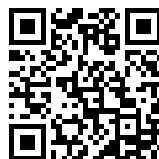

This is a reproduction of a library book that was digitized by Google as part of an ongoing effort to preserve the information in books and make it universally accessible.

GoogleTM books

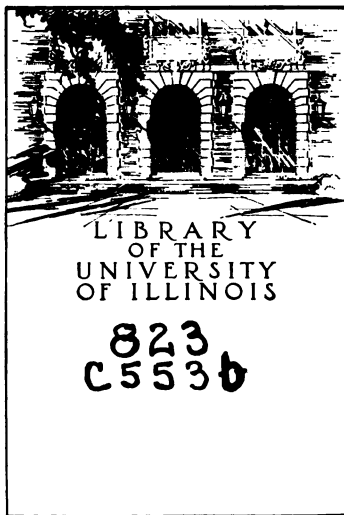
<http://books.google.com>



AUTOGRAPH FICTION LIBRARY

Isabel C. Clarke

ORAL HISTORY



The person charging this material is responsible for its return to the library from which it was withdrawn on or before the **Latest Date** stamped below.

Theft, mutilation, and underlining of books are reasons for disciplinary action and may result in dismissal from the University.

To renew call Telephone Center, 333-8400

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS LIBRARY AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

OCT 21 1981

L161—O-1096

1913

BY THE BLUE RIVER

Novels by Isabel C. Clarke

Published by Benziger Brothers

In same Uniform Series, each, net, \$2.00; postage, 15 cents

SELMA

A girl's progress from tragedy to happiness.

IT HAPPENED IN ROME

"Among the very best of her many good books."—*Ave Maria*.

THE VILLA BY THE SEA

"An exciting tale, well managed."—*Fortnightly Review*.

CHILDREN OF THE SHADOW

"The author sketches in sensitive but clear strokes."—*The Tablet*.

ANNA NUGENT

"Consummate grace and sure art."—*Ecclesiastical Review*.

VIOLA HUDSON

"A striking story—a distinct addition to Catholic literature."—*Liguorian*.

CARINA

"The greatest Catholic woman in fiction."—*Catholic Tribune*.

In the Autograph Fiction Library

12mo, cloth, colored top, net, \$1.50; postage, 10 cents

AVERAGE CABINS

"Belongs to the class of which there cannot be too many."—*Ave Maria*.

THE LIGHT ON THE LAGOON

"Is told in Miss Clarke's best style."—*Messenger of the Sacred Heart*.

THE POTTER'S HOUSE

"Characteristically effective descriptive passages."—*America*.

TRESSIDER'S SISTER

"The story is well and interestingly told."—*Catholic World*.

URSULA FINCH

"A wholesome and delightful love story."—*Fortnightly Review*.

EUNICE

"So charming in telling, so Catholic in spirit."—*Catholic Universe*.

THE ELSTONES

"The interest never flags."—*America*.

LADY TRENT'S DAUGHTER

"Good fiction is richer for its advent."—*New World*.

CHILDREN OF EVE

"The narrative is powerful."—*Boston Evening Record*.

THE DEEP HEART

"Altogether delightful, graceful and uplifting."—*Catholic Bulletin*.

WHOSE NAME IS LEGION

"It is a thrilling setting handled with power."—*Ecclesiastical Review*.

FINE CLAY

"Full of human interest, not a dull page."—*Western Catholic*.

PRISONERS' YEARS

"The book is interesting throughout."—*Exponent*.

THE REST HOUSE

"The interest holds down to the last line."—*Brooklyn Tablet*.

ONLY ANNE

"A genuine welcome addition to Catholic fiction."—*Ave Maria*.

THE SECRET CITADEL

"The plot is original and forceful."—*Magnificat*.

BY THE BLUE RIVER

"Full of charm and interest."—*St. Anthony Messenger*.

BY THE BLUE RIVER

A novel by

I. Clarke

NEW YORK

Benziger brothers

1913

1023
C 5536

1023
C 5536

TO
COMTESSE JOSEPH DE SONIS

GEN24JAN44
VICTOR BOOKS

**The drift of pinions, would we hearken,
Beats at our own clay-shuttered doors.**

FRANCIS THOMPSON

BY THE BLUE RIVER

CHAPTER I

MRS. AUBREY AMORY was sitting beside the window which, from an eyrie-like altitude, gave, as the expression goes, upon an inconspicuous and squalid London street. The said window was open both top and bottom for about the space of six inches, and it had repulsed Mrs. Amory's efforts, many times renewed, to move it further in either direction. She had now abandoned the endeavor as futile, and, indeed, the air thus reluctantly admitted was so impregnated with the odors of a sultry July day in London, that it was scarcely cooler or more salubrious than the atmosphere already prevailing in the small and rather dark room, with its heavy "plushette" curtains, which jealously conserved the dust of generations.

Opposite, a row of grimy houses, with windows carefully screened by dusky-white lace curtains, confronted Mrs. Amory with a vague un-speculativeness. She could see an unbeautiful prospect of roofs and chimneys which, by their proximity to her own window, seemed almost to shut out the sky, since the small patch of it that was visible to her was a mere elusive strip, gray,

and opaque. No clouds moved across that monotonous, metal-like surface. At the further end of the street there was a square, in which could be discerned a few brave plane trees, that lifted dark boughs above the soot-blackened turf and the groups of depressed laurel bushes. The grass, intersected by gravel paths, resembled only, in its decay, a sheet of wrinkled brown paper. Near the pavement a shabby man was wheeling a barrow laden with bananas. Dirty children played on the doorsteps and in the road with languid querulousness, for the airless heat had deprived them of all vigor. Every now and then a gust of burning east wind stirred the pieces of waste paper in the gutters, and as they drifted forlornly by they seemed to resemble the maimed flight of stained and wounded birds. The outlook was scarcely inspiring; it, indeed, suggested the epitomized expression of all that was unlovely, sordid, and unattractive.

Judging from her appearance, which was one of extreme and fresh daintiness, it must be admitted that Mrs. Amory looked entirely out of harmony with her present environment. Only the tips of her fingers were slightly blackened with those repeated efforts to grapple with the still unconquered window. The ephemeral stains upon that delicate surface, rendered the more visible as her hands rested on the soft whiteness of her summer dress, accentuated rather than diminished the strange incongruity of this woman in surroundings so coarsely unbeautiful. But she had of late, and in divers places, found herself so completely at variance with any environ-

ment that fate had offered for her acceptance, that this particular one seemed actually incapable of any power to touch or hurt her. In a word, the cup which had been full was now merely overflowing, and the only perceptible difference lay in the venue which now claimed her, with all its added accidents of squalor, airlessness, and conditions of acute physical discomfort.

It has been affirmed that certain forms of physical pain, continuously inflicted, can in time produce a kind of merciful paralysis of the nerves, rendering them incapable of experiencing an increased degree of suffering. The same is probably true of mental anguish; repeated shocks have been known to destroy the edge of it, and diminish the victim's capacity for feeling a marked accession of pain.

This had been the recent experience of Mrs. Amory, who looked fragile and unequal to the strain of great happenings. For thirty years her bark of life had sailed only in serene seas, and then suddenly, without warning, a tempest had overtaken it. It had escaped from its moorings and drifted from its anchorage in sheltering harbors to plunge into a storm-tossed ocean, battered by immense waves and grievously persecuted by tormenting winds. In a word, she had suffered shipwreck, and amid the wreckage she could discern the strange and almost unrecognizable remnants of all that had spelled love and hope, security and happiness.

She was above medium height, although in this age of giantesses she would scarcely have been called tall. Her small head and long neck

added, however, to the impression of height. She was still extremely beautiful, and looked less than her thirty years. A daughter of the South, her thick, soft hair was of a deep brown run through with golden threads that gave it a dusky look as of imprisoned sunshine seen through shadows; her eyes were dark brown, the eyelids heavy and thickly fringed with silken lashes; she had small, delicately cut features, and a brow of singular beauty. She looked rather too young to be the mother of the boy who sat composedly reading a book at the table, his chin propped upon his brown hands.

If she had been able to experience any fresh sensations of grief or pain, the thought of her son must surely have had full power to inflict them. But the aspect of David, an unquestioning, patient, and acquiescent aspect, conveyed no thrill of agony to her nerve-centers. She wondered, perhaps, at his quietness, at the almost exaggerated impression of tranquillity conveyed by his untroubled face, and perhaps she was even able to pity him because he was to be called upon at such an early age to share the inevitable disgrace and disaster which had fallen upon the house, and of which he would hereafter be destined in his own person to reap the most bitter harvest. He was her only child, and he had been born during the first year of her married life, completing a happiness which had already seemed transcendent. Since then there had been no more babies, and Mrs. Amory was now able to regard this fact with a devout thankfulness. She had often wanted a little daugh-

ter, and Aubrey had wished for one too; now she was glad that no second pair of eyes watched her with that expression of intelligent and compassionate sympathy and solicitude which she had discerned of late upon David's face.

To David the present circumstances and surroundings into which he had suddenly found himself thrust were full of a passionate perplexity. Like most children, he had been simply a pawn to be moved from square to square by his parents, with relentless if kindly determination, and the fact that he had been so governed and controlled in all exterior things had produced in him a habit of submission which stood him in good stead now that the moves had ceased to be pleasant and agreeable. He could not help feeling that his mother must find their present surroundings fully as hateful as he did. He knew too well what she liked and disliked not to be perfectly aware how exceedingly distasteful to her must be these rooms in the hot, airless, and squalid street. Loud disturbing noises, the least trace of dust or dirt, things out of their normal places, persistent questioning—all these things were, he knew, abhorrent to her. And here she had them all—except the questioning. It was for this reason that he had abstained from any manifestation of curiosity when she had first brought him hither. He could at least spare her this. He knew that no capricious preference for the locality had induced her to come here. The street could offer, indeed, no advantages of outlook nor of restfulness. He wondered sometimes why she sat

there hour after hour by the window, gazing down upon its dull length. She was watching and waiting in a dull, hopeless fashion. David forbore to disturb her passive reverie. He was reading the "Life of St. Ignatius," and the thought had come to him that, perhaps, if he tried now to be very good, and quiet, and uncomplaining, he might succeed later on in being good enough to be a Jesuit. The boy's mind was thrilled by the romantic history of the soldier-saint; it had already transferred him far beyond the small and grubby room, and placed him among the scenes of which he was reading. The fierce fighting at Pampeluna, the unspeakable and nameless graces bestowed upon his hero at Manresa, completely possessed his mind, and held his imagination in thrall. He saw the brave Spaniard wounded and in anguish, and dreaming still of earthly conquest and worldly glory; he saw him arise converted and go forth to conquer souls instead of kingdoms. No one was so permanently real to David Amory. His dark eyes shone as he read; the stifling atmosphere of the room was forgotten.

The door opened at last, and a slatternly-looking girl entered. Her shoes creaked with a loud, disturbing sound. She spread a cloth of grayish white hue upon the table, dumped thereon some dusky glasses and coarse plates, and a small dish with a dull metal cover, about the concealed contents of which David felt no curiosity. A discolored carafe of tepid water and some tarnished cruets completed the forlorn appurtenances of the meal.

Mrs. Amory rose and came slowly towards the table.

"David, have you washed your hands? We must have luncheon."

He put the book aside. "I have washed them, mother," he said.

He crossed himself, murmuring Latin words. Mrs. Amory copied his action, and said *Amen* rather mechanically. She lifted the cover and disclosed two dark, amorphous objects, blackened, unappetizing. They were chops, and she put one on David's plate and cut a tiny piece off the other for herself. Clearly she had no appetite; and when had she ever eaten a meal served in such fashion? The first mouthful sufficed; she put down her knife and fork and glanced anxiously at David. "Do try and eat, dear," she said; "I know it isn't very nice."

Obediently he ate the whole of his portion. It was not easy. Burned black outside, the chop was raw and of a dreadful scarlet within. The taste was horrible; he tried to disguise it with pieces of the hard, stale bread. If much in his young life had tended to spoil and pamper this only son of a rich man, brought up amidst luxurious surroundings, there had been also a great deal of quiet endeavor on his mother's part to train him. She, who now begged him to eat as for a favor rendered to herself, had not permitted him to refuse food that was offered to him, nor to leave anything upon his plate. He had not been allowed to choose what he preferred to eat. And he had always made these attempts at discipline easy for her; had

always submitted, always acquiesced, never rebelled nor questioned. And now he was accepting this also without question. There was a great deal of natural and spontaneous piety among the Amorys, nurtured through centuries of persecution and of clinging with passionate fidelity to the old Faith; in every generation it had made religious of the sons and daughters; it was so strong in producing these vocations that they had come to be regarded as inevitable. Mrs. Amory wondered idly now whether David at his present early age, for he was little more than twelve, was already informed with that peculiar detachment of soul which temporal things can not disturb nor hurt. How much did he know or guess? He had not asked for his father. He had made no complaint in spite of the novel discomfort of his surroundings, the unpalatable food, the stifling rooms.

She rang the bell, and after a considerable interval the girl returned and removed the traces of the meal. Mrs. Amory went back to her seat by the window. David took up his book, and was soon oblivious to all but the romance of his favorite saint. The heat grew more intense. There was no sun, but the sky was covered with a leaden pall of cloud. It was one of the days when the heat seems a pitiless thing, unsanctified by sunshine; it resembled, Mrs. Amory thought, the smoking breath of some evil dragon. It threatened even to destroy her courage.

CHAPTER II

AS FAR back as David could remember his London home had been the big house in Park Lane, with its serene and flower-scented atmosphere, its entrancing views of the trees and the greensward, and the many-colored blossoms that in summer made soft blots of scarlet and pink, blue and gold. From his own large and comfortable room at the top of the house he could see the groups of distant buildings that looked, in their faint lilac tints, like fairy, insubstantial towers melting into the blue mists of the distance. He could remember that as quite a little child he used to creep out of bed on moonlit nights, and imagine that he saw the hosts of fairy mythology—nymphs and dryads, elves and fauns and gnomes—at play under those gnarled stems; he could remember even cherishing the hope that eventually they would invite him to come out, perhaps on the back of some strong-winged creature, to take part in those revels when all the wise people of the world lay asleep. He had always been a very happy little boy, the only and much-indulged child of his parents. As he grew older he became aware that such dreams as he had entertained were foolish, that never could he be summoned by those mysterious denizens of wood and field, nor be swept off his feet, as he had imagined, and whirled into

the air, touching, perhaps, the very gold of the stars, and he saddened at the thought that these were childish visions to be laid aside.

He was eight years old when he made his first confession. He remembered going with his mother into the Church, dimly lit, where the kind and pitying figure of Our Lady watched him from her altar with its precious inlaid marbles. The thought of her gave him courage, for he was trembling, and clung tightly to his mother's hand. A childish lie, which he had told three years before and which had never been found out, lay very heavy on his heart that day. He thought of it as a black spot upon his soul. It had been an absurd, futile, foolish little lie, but he shrank from revealing it. "Go now, David," his mother had said gently. He began to sob in unrestrained fashion. She had looked at him surprised. "If you have ever really offended God on purpose," she said quietly, "you will feel happier when you have been to confession and received absolution. Be *very* sorry, David." He could remember the look in her eyes as she had said these words that fell like balm on his heart. He rose and went into the confessional. When he came back to her he had the sensation of feeling newly washed; she put her arms round him and kissed him—with what love, with what tenderness. That day marked an epoch in David's life. He did not go away to school for two years, but even school made little difference to him. He lived in a world of his own. It was a strange little world for a child; it consisted almost entirely of medi-

tation and prayer, with a periodical drastic investigation of his own puny relation to God. His fear of offending Him was coupled with a passionate desire to please Him. He went frequently to confession of his own will. Mrs. Amory never interfered with him. She did not check these symptoms of an hereditary piety. He was a healthy boy, worked hard and played well; there was nothing morbid about him. He was unselfish and he was courageous, and at school she gathered that he was liked by both boys and masters. Sometimes she could almost have wished that he could be frankly naughty and troublesome like other children. She would have felt more as if he belonged to her if she could have punished him and then forgiven him. She saw that the child's interior life was hidden from her. She spoke of it once to an old priest who had been her director for many years. He had hesitated a moment, and then said, "You need not have any fears about your son; he belongs to God."

Of late, however, things had not been as usual in the house. David had returned from school earlier than usual for his summer holidays, on account of an epidemic malady which had attacked many of the boys. It seemed to him that he saw much less of his parents than he generally did; that when his father appeared he was moody and irritable. Then had followed mysterious and disturbing happenings. One night he had been awakened from sleep by the sound of harsh, clamoring voices, uplifted as if in violent discussion, and he seemed, too, to discern an

undercurrent of sobbing that tore his heart. He crept out of bed and stole to the top of the stairs. A cold terror seized him; it was scarcely a physical feeling, yet it made his body tremble and shiver. He moved noiselessly down the first flight of about a dozen steps, and paused on the landing. He could see nothing, but the voices, the sobbing, still possessed the house. Angry voices, disputing voices, and a pleading, pitiful voice that belonged to his mother. He slipped down the stairs as far as the landing of the first floor, and creeping cautiously forward he looked over the quaintly carved banisters, and saw a group of people in the hall. His mother was there; she wore a thin black dress, open at the throat. He could see the diamonds shining in her hair and round her neck. She was holding his father's arm. Two men were with them, strong-looking men in dark-colored clothes. David did not know how he had first received the impression that something was wrong; the mere grouping of the actors in the little drama, the sound of voices raised above their normal pitch, were hardly sufficient in themselves to produce it. But the boy, wakened abruptly from his sleep, was in a highly nervous condition; his mind, always acutely receptive, was stimulated by excitement and by a strong presentiment of coming calamity. Then his father turned, and he saw his face distinctly under the sharp, white glare of the electric light. It was a sight that David never forgot. Aubrey Amory was a slightly built, tall man, very fair and colorless, handsome, and debonair, with a kind of careless grace that many

people found attractive. Now his white face, passionately defiant and yet exhausted, seemed to his son completely changed. He had the look in his eyes of a creature caught and trapped—and grievously hurt in the process. David, forgetting his terror, watched with the unconsciously critical attention of childhood. His mother was weeping, and he had never before seen her cry. The sound of her ill-suppressed weeping was unendurable; he longed to rush down and fling his arms about her and comfort her. But it was upon his father that David's eyes were fixed with a fascinated stare. What had happened to him? He looked terror-stricken. It was horrible that he should look so frightened. These men had frightened him. Why were they there at this late hour? Why were they leading him now, weak and unresisting as a spent quarry, across the hall towards the door? David could see the faces of the two men—quiet, emotionless faces; they conveyed no appreciable impression to the boy, except, perhaps, one of relentless implacability. They were *compelling* his father to accompany them. He did not wish to go, but he had no choice. What had he done? Why were they taking him away? But already the front door was open, and a chilly gust of evening air swept through the hall and up the stairs, causing David to shiver in his thin sleeping-suit. He ran to the window. Now he could see the dark, wet pavement outside, upon which the big street lamp seemed to cast a rosy river of light that gleamed strangely. And with those two men his father went out into the night, and through

the open door David could hear a sound of horses' hoofs, of grinding wheels, disturbing the silence. Then these sounds also died away, and gave place to the accustomed rumble and stir of the traffic. David did not wait to see his mother come up the stairs; he crept back to his room, feeling instinctively that he had seen something which it was undesirable for him, a child, to see. He was quite accidentally in possession of knowledge which for some reason had been hidden from him. He did not mention the incident to any one. When he saw his mother on the following day there were no traces in her face of that abandoned weeping. She told him that his father had been obliged to leave home, that he would be away for a few days, perhaps longer. She was quite tranquil and composed, and showed no sign of grief, and he felt that he could not tell her what he had seen. He was silent, not from motives of fear, but because he felt an instinctive shrinking from knowing more. It was something terrible that had made his father look like that, and had made his mother cry in that heartbroken fashion. During the next few days the household was strangely demoralized. There were constant ringings of the front-door bell; people clamored on the doorstep, refusing to go away; the meals were served irregularly, and all the servants departed, except Anna, the maid, and one young girl. And after a few days of chaos and acute discomfort David had accompanied his mother to these lodgings in Queen Elizabeth Street.

An hour or more had passed since the wretched

luncheon had been removed, and during all that time Mrs. Amory had not stirred from her seat by the window. The children were no longer playing in the street below; the man with the barrow of bananas had disappeared—perhaps to some more profitable locality, but a boy, raucous-voiced, was shouting some unintelligible words as he held out the pink sheet of an evening paper. On the poster he held Mrs. Amory, by bending forward a little, could read these words in large black letters:

THE GREAT CITY FRAUDS

AMORY BEFORE THE MAGISTRATE

SCENES IN COURT, YORKSHIRE—ALL OUT 347.

As Frances Amory read these words she felt that each one was stamped and etched upon her heart, bitten in with burning and corrosive acid. A shiver passed through her frame. She felt as if she had been touched unexpectedly by a cold, stabbing knife. Her limbs quivered strongly, and then a little hot flush spread over the pallor of her face. She hoped that David would not come to the window. She had the feeling that if he attempted to move at that moment she should scream with pain. But he read on, seemingly absorbed in his book.

Yes—every one knew now in the world from which she had fled. Every one would talk. She could hear the kind of thing that would be said. “They had always known things weren’t quite square. Would Mrs. Amory stick to him? It would teach her a lesson—proud little devil, who pretended to be pious! There was a boy,

wasn't there? A chip of the old block, no doubt!"

Yes—she felt that David was already branded at twelve years old. He had come into his heritage early—a sinister heritage of disgrace. She longed to go across the room, and take him in her arms and gather him to her breast, and plead for his pardon. A sob rose in her throat and choked her. Again the words danced before her eyes. "*Amory before the Magistrate. Scenes in Court.*" How often she had read similar headlines in regard to other cases, and how little she had thought of and pitied the victims. How little had she ever imagined that such sordid and horrible things could come into her own life to disarrange and disorganize it! She had married into an honorable family; she had felt that she was giving her child a clean, unblemished heritage. And now it was all swept away; he would inherit only shame and disgrace, the more unforgettable because he was an Amory and the heir, after his father, to Cold Mead. . . . What would those possessions mean to him in the future? He would always be known as Aubrey Amory's son. She roused herself from the trend of these wounding thoughts; they seemed to her full of disloyalty towards the man she loved still, in spite of all things, with her whole heart.

There came a loud knock at the door, and the servant's shrill voice announced "Sir Stephen Amory." An old man came slowly into the room. He held out both hands to Mrs. Amory as she rose and approached him.

"I couldn't get here sooner, Frances," he said.

His voice was courteous and restrained—so restrained that it gave almost an impression of hardness. But Mrs. Amory was sensitive and nervous; she could interpret voices as blind people can; she knew when they were hostile, when they were false. This one, harsh and abrupt, with scarcely concealed emotion, came to her ears like music in the midst of extreme desolation. It seemed to sweep away the gray fear that had so lately crystallized round the problem of David's future. And the eyes, too, were kind—sad and kind.

Her own look was one of almost passionate gratitude; the small, shriveled, wizened old man seemed to her a veritable messenger of good tidings.

"David," she said, "this is your Uncle Stephen. You remember him, I am sure."

The old man and the boy shook hands, and Stephen looked inquiringly into the dark, bright face. In the child's demeanor there was a touch of foreign grace and reverence; he bowed low over the thin, gnarled fingers.

Stephen Amory stroked the boy's head. Upon him in his old age, upon David in his childhood, the disgrace of Aubrey Amory had fallen suddenly, mercilessly.

"Is there any . . . any news?" she asked.

They stood together near the window. She made a slight gesture toward David, who went back to his seat and opened his book.

"Of course, it isn't over—it is likely to last some days."

"I haven't told David anything," she whispered, with an anxious glance at the bent, dark head of her son.

"Perhaps it is better. He'll know quite soon enough. I came to tell you that they are going to consider the question of bail."

"Yes?" she said faintly.

"I think it will be heavy—but I can manage it, and Gwenny will help me if necessary. Then, of course, he would come here."

"It is very kind of you, Stephen," she said, in a dead voice that held no gratitude, only despair.

"But I think it would be better for you all to come to Cold Mead. Aubrey can join you there. You can't go on stewing in these rooms, Frances, in this weather—it is bad for both you and David."

"Oh," she said, with a little catch in her voice, "it is very kind of you—but I simply couldn't leave town now, until something is settled. I will wait for Aubrey."

"It may be some days, Frances, and you can do no good."

"I can see him."

"It only hurts him."

"I think it would hurt him more if I didn't go."

"And David? Shall I take David back with me?"

"David," said his mother, raising her voice a little.

He put down his book and came toward them.

"Yes, mother?"

"Will you come back with me to Cold Mead

to-morrow morning, David?" said Stephen Amory.

"I am so sorry, Uncle Stephen, but I couldn't leave mother," he answered. "Perhaps I am not old enough to be told—things. But I can see that something is wrong. It has been strange ever since those men came the other night and took daddy away." It was the first time he had ever mentioned his knowledge of the episode, and Frances gave a little start as if she had been sharply struck. "If I go away, mother will have no one to look after her. Where is daddy? He has often been away before, but we waited for him at home, and he always came back. Who were those men who made him go away so late at night?"

Stephen held out his hand and drew the child nearer to him.

"David," he said, "you are right—something has happened. You are not too young to know, but your mother wished to save you pain. It is something very grave and serious. Your father is in great trouble. While he is away you must try and be brave and good, and a comfort to your mother."

Stephen Amory regarded him almost tenderly. The curious, old-fashioned utterance, the way the boy had of articulating very clearly each syllable in a voice that was low and musical, like his mother's, had arrested his attention.

"Oh, David," said Mrs. Amory impulsively, "how did you hear anything? I thought you were in bed!"

"I heard loud voices—they woke me," said

David; "so I went downstairs. And I saw them take daddy away, and I could do nothing! I could only watch and wonder what they were doing. I didn't know that they meant to take him away, or I should have tried to stop them. But if they came again and tried to take my mother——" His eyes flamed. "I must be here—I mustn't leave her." He turned a flushed, passionate face to Stephen Amory. "Will daddy come back soon?"

It is not easy to inform an intelligent person of twelve that his father has been remanded on a grave charge of fraud, the question of bail awaiting decision. Stephen only said:

"He can not return to you at present. In a few days, I hope——"

He had come straight from the police-court; he had seen Aubrey hissed by a hostile crowd. The sight, the sound, had sickened him. The angry murmur of a great mob has always in it a menacing sound. And the blanched, handsome face of Aubrey was a specter that Stephen thought would haunt him till the end of his life. There was no fear in it; the eyes looked out with a bright, hard stare; he had not lost, could not lose, that easy, conquering, debonair aspect which had always imbued him with so much charm. Only the color, so ashen pale, of his face; the hard, expectant eyes, as of an animal trapped and maimed, gave him a look that was pitifully changed. And in the fleeting vision of Aubrey, borne away swiftly before the angry cries of the crowd, Stephen saw written the disaster to his name, his race.

David crept nearer to his mother and clasped her hand. He knew, without being told, that his father was in prison. A sense of nebulous horror and shame crept into his heart. The firm and secure foundations upon which his life had hitherto been established seemed suddenly to have given way beneath his feet.

"We shall stay here," she said, "until something is settled. I have a little—enough to go on with—to enable us to stay here for a week or two."

Stephen had always known that she would make no scene, there would be no display of passionate grief, no complaint nor reproach. She would waste no pity upon herself; it would all be needed by the husband who had ruined her life and brought disgrace upon his name, and by this little son in whose dark eyes the tragedy was already writing its history of half-understood pain.

"You must not be troubled about ways and means," said Stephen. "I will send you a check. Your husband's family—of which I am the head—can not be unmindful of their responsibility toward you and David."

"Thank you, Stephen," she said simply.

She felt like Hagar driven into the wilderness with her child. And into the wilderness Stephen had come as deliverer; his only anxiety seemed to be to make amends, as an Amory, for the sins of an Amory.

"If you agree," she went on in her cool, proud voice, "I shall remain here—until we know the result. I—can not give up hope! And here—I am so completely hidden. I have read of mean

streets"—her face twitched with a pitiful attempt to smile—"surely this is one of the meanest."

"But David—his health will suffer."

"He may choose," she said listlessly.

Would it be easier for her if he went with Stephen? His presence made the need for self-control so imperative!

"David, there is a question of your remaining here with your mother or of returning with me to Cold Mead. Your cousin Doris will be delighted to have you for a playmate—she is about your own age."

David's face became suddenly hard. He turned to his mother. "You would come?" he said.

"David, it would not be very convenient for me to leave London just now," she said, almost pleadingly. "But it would be better for you to go. The country is nice now, and you have not been to Cold Mead for such a long time."

"My Uncle Stephen will not think me discourteous," he said, "if I refuse his kind invitation." The old-fashioned speech drew an unwilling smile from both his hearers. "I should like to go to Cold Mead and see Doris. But you will understand"—and he flung his small, dark head proudly back—"that I can not leave my mother. I wish she would come too! The men could not find her there—she would be safe—and you, you would be there, Uncle Stephen, and you could prevent them, if they did come, from taking her away!" A quiver passed through his frame.

Stephen's eyes gleamed with an odd light. "My dear David," he said, and his voice shook a little.

And again before his vision there passed that sickening spectacle of a man with a white, desperate face and tortured eyes, at whom the crowd hissed mercilessly; he seemed to hear again that sinister angry murmur, suggesting brutal passions of revenge unleashed. A stag at bay, facing its pursuers for the last time in a final, desperate defiance. Spent quarry hunted to death, half hypnotized by the loud baying of approaching hounds. The degradation of Aubrey had indeed been a pitiable sight to witness.

Facing these two innocent victims, Stephen's heart failed him for the first time. There seemed to be no way of escape for them, the beautiful woman whom Aubrey had brought so low, the child death-pale with the haunting fear that those unknown enemies who had seized his father might also drag his mother from his side.

"I shall see you again to-morrow," he said, and took Mrs. Amory's hand. "I think we must let David do as he wishes. He shall remain with you. I shall go to Cold Mead to-morrow for Sunday, and return on Monday morning. Good-by, David." He stooped and kissed the little, dark, thoughtful face held up to him.

CHAPTER III

THE Amorys were a Gloucestershire family, whose property, situated in a remote valley of the Cotswold Hills, had been in their possession since the days of Henry VIII. During the persecution under Elizabeth they had been compelled to abandon it, but it had subsequently been restored to them by Royal Charter, in recognition of some inconspicuous service rendered to the first Charles. This property had passed through many vicissitudes; it had even for a brief period suffered confiscation, when its royal and unfortunate donor had passed so tragically to his rest, and its very name of Cold Mead had been bestowed upon it by the shivering Roundhead troops encamped there on a chilly winter's night, when the icy winds raged and stormed over those naked heights, as if to punish with their fury these rough invaders of the peaceful valley sheltered in a fold of the hills. By morning the wind had dropped, and under shelter of the covering mists that curled up from the Colne John and Mary Amory had fled from their beautiful home. From childhood John Amory had known his way over those bleak heights, and he guided his young wife in safety till they reached the town of Cirencester. Thence they drove, disguised, to Bristol, and crossed the seas, for

Mary's child had yet to be born, and the safety of his wife and heir were things more precious to John than his home. At the Restoration Mary returned to Cold Mead alone with her little son, for John had died in exile, and to the last had babbled, like Falstaff, of those green fields from which he had been forced to flee.

But on the whole the Amorys, despite their stubborn clinging to the old Faith, had escaped much molestation, a fact that was largely due to the isolated position of Cold Mead in former days. It lay at least three miles westward of the old Roman road that runs so straightly across the Cotswold Hills from Bath, northward through Gloucestershire; and the steep lanes that lay between the house and the high road were in those days almost impassable in winter, and were at all times somewhat dangerous to carriages. Cold Mead was one of the most perfect examples of Tudor architecture in the country; its fine façade of gray stone, delicately tinted by the kindly hand of centuries of sunshine and rain and westerly winds, had ever been the delight of its owners, who had contented themselves by keeping the house in repair, rather than by adding incongruities of architecture of their own respective periods. All had apparently been characterized by the same abstinence, whether they had belonged to the spendthrift owners who diminished the goodly heritage of acres, or to the parsimonious ones who painstakingly increased them; their respect for the four walls of their home effectually prevented them from any mistaken ideas of "improving" it. They had given

soldiers and statesmen to the country, priests and nuns to the Church, but the Amory of whom they were most proud was he who had suffered martyrdom in the reign of Elizabeth, and whose right hand was still preserved incorrupt in the little chapel within the house.

After the fashion of many old families in modern days, they had become nomadic and dispersed; as a clan they scarcely existed, and many of them had never set eyes on Cold Mead where Sir Stephen Amory, now a widower, lived in such dreary seclusion with his only child, Doris. He seldom now emerged from his retreat, for he was a man of quiet and studious tastes. The property was strictly entailed, and at his death would pass to Aubrey, the son of his father's second marriage, and then to his son David. More than thirty years' difference in age divided Stephen and Aubrey. There had been other children of their father's first marriage, but most of them had died in infancy, and the only other survivor was Lady Orme, the youngest—as Stephen had been the eldest—of the family. Thus Stephen, Gwendolyn Orme, the Aubrey Amorys, and their son David, and then the next in point of succession, their cousin, Drayton Amory and his son, who was a few years older than David, were the only Amorys left who were of any consequence. Drayton had made an excessively imprudent marriage when little more than twenty years of age, but had rehabilitated himself by his subsequent success at the Bar. The unspeakable cause of his early infatuation had died before her follies had broken his heart and des-

troyed his career, or no doubt she would have succeeded in fulfilling both these dismal expectations. The boy promised well, but less well, perhaps, than David.

Thus in the midst of a family, who, beyond the perpetration of some youthful follies, had always been distinguished for its learning and piety, for right living and high principles, whose members had shown themselves in past days ready to die for the Faith which was to them no shadowy ideal, but a triumphant cause, permanent and changeless, and for which a practical loyalty was ever forthcoming among them—an entirely new and calamitous deviation had been presented in the person of Aubrey Amory.

As he was the first of his family to enter the mad city world of speculation and money-making, so he was the first to win for himself immense wealth, and a prominent position both in society and in the world of finance. His mother's by no means inconsiderable fortune, which he had inherited, had from the first days of his marriage appeared inadequate. His ancestors had always lived upon their acres and since the before-mentioned John Amory, who had been so singled out for favor by the luckless monarch, there had never been an instance of an Amory occupying a conspicuous place beyond his normal inherited position as Lord of the Manor at Cold Mead. Indeed, for more than a century and a half their obdurate clinging to the Catholic faith had in itself sufficed to keep them in happy obscurity. Such a position could never in itself have contented Aubrey Amory. No

deviation from a type could have been more marked than his. Here was a man avowedly ambitious, pleasure-seeking, and imbued with a passionate love of gambling. His handsome, boyish face, his bright, picturesque personality, his winning ways, had won for him many friends. One did not readily detect the knave in Aubrey. He had lost both his parents in early youth, not that his doting father, advanced in years, nor his young, frivolous, backboneless mother, could conceivably have been of much use in molding that unstable character. Till he was twenty-one he had been under his brother's guardianship, and Stephen had always been far too indulgent, "criminally indulgent," so Drayton Amory was wont to express it. But Stephen had loved the boy with almost a father's tenderness, and Aubrey had given him in return a careless, nonchalant affection, and recognizing its fragile character he had been half afraid to imperil it by any outward show of severity, even when his conduct merited it. His gay and charming manners, his eager intelligence, his quickness, his sympathy, plausible but not always sincere, continued to hold Stephen's affection, and even though he disapproved of Aubrey's mode of life he abstained from spoken criticism upon it.

Until now he had scarcely envisaged the personality of Frances Amory, of whom he had seen very little. They could never spare the time to visit Cold Mead except for a week or so in the shooting season, and Stephen very rarely went to town except when urgent business necessitated his doing so. He had not at first altogether ap-

proved of Aubrey's choice of a wife. She was very young, little more than seventeen, at the time of their marriage, and Aubrey, being only four years older, they presented a picture of such complete youthfulness and immaturity that Stephen's heart was filled with misgiving. He had regarded his young sister-in-law as one of those cosmopolitan creatures, child of two races, belonging to neither, and exempt from all the traditions of both. She seemed to him beautiful, strange, and unusual. While her unusualness attracted him, he found himself wishing that Aubrey had chosen a simple English girl of good family for his wife. Frances was the only daughter of Antony Forncett, by his marriage with a French lady, through whom she had inherited a beautiful property in Algeria, where much of her childhood had been spent. Aubrey and his wife had made a journey to the domain de l'Oued Zerqa * during their honeymoon, but had never again visited it, though all Frances's personal income was derived from it.

Aubrey had fallen in love with her at first sight, which was on the occasion of her debut at a ball in town. Their engagement followed with surprising rapidity, for he had left her no peace till she promised to marry him. Drayton Amory, on first seeing them together, had affirmed that the enthusiasm was all on Aubrey's side. Afterward he informed Lady Orme that he had changed his opinion, and that he believed Frances to be entirely devoted to her husband. It was Drayton who first discovered estimable

* Pronounced Wed Zerka (the Blue River).

qualities in the quiet, rather silent, but beautiful girl. He called the attention of the family in general to his conviction that she was entirely worthy of them. He had said it with some cynicism, for he was aware that he had in the past given evidence of his own bad taste in the person of his wife, then recently dead. Lady Orme had laughed. "One of Drayton's paragons," she had told Stephen, in repeating the conversation. But she met and liked Frances, and saw a good deal of her, and in time began to think her too good for Aubrey, with his smiling nonchalance. Their extravagant mode of living became to Stephen and Gwendolyn a source of anxiety, since it betrayed signs of increasing rather than of diminishing. Aubrey spent more and more time in the City; it was commonly supposed that he had many irons—some very worthless ones—in the fire. But the *débâcle* was totally unexpected. In these days the world has become sadly accustomed to the failure of great financial schemes, and to the exposure of heartless frauds, the falsifying of balance-sheets, the promotion of worthless companies. But even so, the recital of Aubrey Amory's achievements promised to be a remarkable example in the history of plausible frauds.

Aubrey and his wife had not always been regarded with much favor by those members of the family who, in the passing of years and division of fortunes, had been forced to occupy less exalted positions in the world than those traditional to their name. Mrs. Sampson Amory, who was the daughter of a cotton-spinner, had invariably

"sniffed" when she read the lists of their guests in the "Morning Post." That her own name was not, and could never be, included among them, lent malice to her speech when she discussed them. She would explain that only Aubrey's great wealth sustained his insecure and undeserved footing in society; that it could be due to any charm possessed by him or his wife she indignantly denied. She was the spokeswoman of the less exalted Amorys, and it was she who instructed them in the right view to take of family affairs. She had a talent for discussing the unimportant; she liked, she said, to get to the bottom of things. It could easily be imagined that the tale of Aubrey's delinquencies would serve her as a topic of conversation for many moons. To the bottom of his financial dealings few feminine minds, unversed in the technical knowledge of company-promoting, could hope to penetrate, but the salient facts, the balance-sheets, the frauds whose victims were the innocent, the foolish, and the ignorant—these things were, it is to be feared, tolerably clear to all. Sampson Amory was such a very distant cousin of Stephen that his name only found a place in the more generously detailed peerages, but his wife took advantage of the connection to call twice yearly at the big house in Park Lane to which, however, ingress was always denied her. She it was who now felt a kind of triumphant satisfaction at the downfall of Aubrey Amory and his wife.

CHAPTER IV

STEPHEN AMORY had not long taken his departure from the dreary little room in Queen Elizabeth Street when the door was again opened by the slatternly servant, who announced in her shrill tones: "Mrs. Sampson Hamory." Frances uttered a desperate, "Oh, *please* say I am not able to see any one!" but the words had hardly left her lips when a firm and heavy tread made the boards in the passage—so guiltless of carpet—creak ominously, and the tall, stout form of a breathless and heated-looking female marched into the room.

"Ah, I have run you to earth at last, Frances!"

Mrs. Amory rose from her seat; her face was paler than usual, she looked as exhausted as if she had been literally instead of metaphorically run to earth, and now could only await, with what heroism she could summon to her aid, the process of being broken up.

Many, many times had her door in Park Lane been ruthlessly closed against Mrs. Sampson, but this time there was no escape. She tried to force a stereotyped smile of welcome, and to brace herself to endure the cumulative punishment which would now inevitably be meted out to her, in return for all those denied ingresses into her sanctum during the happy past.

But she found no words with which to greet her; she wondered, indeed, if any echo of her pitiful protest had reached the large and crimson ears of her visitor.

It is true that very occasionally Frances had invited her and her husband to one of her big musical parties—her “*omnium gatherums*” as she called them—when young and unknown artists sang and played, and any conversation with her guests, beyond a word of conventional greeting, was out of the question.

But always, as long as she could remember her, this portly figure, this wide, highly colored face, with its thin sandy hair bunched out in monstrous fashion with the help of occasionally protruding “pads,” its cold and lusterless eyes that reminded her of a snake, and the fat white hands whose touch nauseated her—had ever awakened within her a wild insensate impulse to immediate flight.

“Why did you not tell me you were leaving Park Lane? I had simply no idea that anything had happened till I saw the posters this afternoon. I could at least have told you of some more comfortable lodgings than these!”

Frances was still silent, not from any perversity, but simply because all utterance seemed to have failed her. Her very helplessness made her dumb. She felt that Mrs. Sampson was a kind of human steam-roller whose menaced advance she could not escape. She gazed at her with large dark eyes full of startled terror.

Fortunately David had gone out. Mrs. Sampson took from her neck a rather grubby gray feather boa and laid it on the table. “How

stifling it is here!" she said; "but I remember you always liked overheated rooms! Your drawing-room reminded me of a greenhouse—I could hardly breathe in it, and I remember Sampson saying it had given him the worst attack of asthma he had ever had! May I not open the window a little more? I am sure we are going to have a thunderstorm!"

She attacked the window with great vigor, shaking it violently, until Frances began to fear she would break it, but in spite of her exertions it showed as little sign of yielding as it had done earlier in the day when Frances herself had tried to open it.

Rendered more breathless and heated by the effort, she gasped and sat down facing Frances, fanning herself with her handkerchief.

"I was determined to find you!" she said, apparently undaunted by the fact that the conversation still consisted only of a monologue. "Sampson thought I had better not. But I said, 'A friend in need is a friend indeed, and I shall go because I am afraid Frances will find how little real use all her fine friends are to her *now*!' Those were my words, and Sampson agreed with me. I was sure I should find you alone!"

A wan smile lit up Frances's face. Sampson was a much-tried man, relegated, during long years of delicate health and much steam-rolling, to a position of unobtrusive servitude in his own house. He had a weak chest, a slight stammer, and always seemed to be suffering from a cold in his head. He earned a small salary as a clerk in a solicitor's office, and had never risen to higher

things, and as his wife had long ago convinced him that this was but the result of his want of intellect, and his general mental and physical deficiencies, he had come to accept his limitations with a pathetic acquiescence.

"Yes—I was determined not to be put off by Sampson," she proceeded. "I wished to be the first to hold out a helping hand, Frances! I am so accustomed to deal with other people's business—it has become quite a second nature to me. I assure you, the women who come to my mother's meetings always say to me, 'What *should* we do without you, ma'am?' "

A slight breathlessness checked her speech during the next minute or two, and gave her an opportunity of examining Mrs. Amory more intently. That dress of hers—a flimsy lacy thing, frail as a cobweb, was a most unsuitable garment for a woman in Frances's position to wear. It must have cost a fortune to start with, and one would not dare trust it to a laundress! Frances would have to think twice about bills for cleaning in the future. This reflection was not altogether an unpleasing one to Mrs. Sampson, who could not be blind to the slim, fragile grace of Frances Amory.

"I said I must try and find things out for myself. I felt I only wanted one word from you—one word, Frances!—to reassure me! I am sure it is all a dreadful mistake—that Aubrey simply can't be guilty of—of all the things the papers are saying about him!"

"I—I have not read the papers," said Frances dully.

"Quite right, my dear. I am very glad that you don't know how spiteful they are! But, as I was saying, I am not one to desert my friends and relations when they are down! Blood is thicker than water, do you not think so, Frances? I dare say Aubrey has been extravagant; you could not keep up that huge house on nothing! But there is no sin in extravagance, and I, for one, am sure of his innocence. I would stake my last sixpence on Aubrey's innocence!" A glow of benevolence added a rich hue to her already purple countenance.

The continued incapacity of Frances to speak was apparently quite unnoticed by her tormentor. Even the *one word* so prayerfully entreated to assure her of Aubrey's innocence was somehow not forthcoming. A slowly materializing fear that soon she would scream outright began to assail Frances. Her overwrought nerves threatened to give way, she felt perfectly hysterical, and did not know whether, if she opened her lips, she should laugh or cry.

In the old days her sense of humor would have enabled her to see the comic side of this woman's coarse impertinence. Now every word fell like a flail. She detected the malice that lay like an undercurrent beneath every phrase. Had she already fallen so low that the Mrs. Sampson Amorys of this world could so wound her, and thrust her into fresh and unsuspected depths of shame and humiliation?

"Just *one word*, Frances!" exhorted her visitor dramatically.

But the word was not forthcoming.

"Perhaps you have been asked not to talk about it before the trial? He is certain to be committed for trial—the inquiry before the magistrate has gone so dead against him, Sampson says. But to an old friend—a relation—Frances!"

"I am afraid I can not discuss my husband's affairs with you, Mrs. Amory. I am very sorry." And Frances drew up her small head proudly, in a supreme effort at self-control.

"You are quite right, my dear—speaking generally. But may I say that this blow falls on us all . . . and we have a right—have we not?—to be reassured!"

"I can not make any exceptions!" said Frances coldly.

She spoke mechanically. The nervousness had passed, and her attitude was brave and proud.

"In fact," she went on, "it was to get away from—from people—that I came here—into these rooms!"

"And very wise of you! I am sure none of your fine friends would ever dream of looking for you here. But you can hardly call *us* 'people,' can you? Why, I was present at your wedding, Frances—it's almost the only time, I'm thankful to say, that I've ever been inside a Roman Catholic church, though, of course, Sampson was very keen about converting me when we first married! When do you expect Aubrey back—this evening?"

Her snake's eyes were fastened upon their victim with a steely glitter. This time she waited

for a reply. Frances gave it without flinching.

"I do not expect him back this evening!"

"Then it is true—that absurd report in the paper—about bail being refused?"

Her always high-pitched and rather shrill tones rose in dramatic and insolent crescendo.

Frances said:

"I am afraid it is impossible for me to satisfy your—your curiosity!"

She could not resist giving this counter-thrust, and it penetrated even the thick hide of Mrs. Sampson, who gave a harsh, mirthless, nervous laugh.

"Friendly interest, my dear Frances—a helping hand to those in need—but not curiosity, I assure you!" she said magnanimously, wondering how any one could ever have described Frances as a charming and agreeable woman. "Well, you haven't told me much, my dear, and I did so hope to hear something really reassuring and comforting!"

She now rose, for her hostess made a slight movement, as if she were about to do so, and this hint was too plain to be ignored.

"Good-by, Frances," she said, tying the feather boa under her large double chin. "Keep up your courage. I feel sure he will leave the court without a stain on his character!"

"Good-by," said Mrs. Amory faintly.

But when the firm footstep had died away on the stairs Frances crept into her bedroom, and hiding her face in the pillow gave way to blinding and long-repressed tears.

CHAPTER V

As Stephen Amory journeyed down to Cold Mead on the following evening his thoughts were full of Frances; her demeanor under this singular misfortune had struck him as particularly admirable. She was so beautiful—so delicate, so fragile-looking; she appealed to his sense of chivalry, and he wondered, if the worst came to the worst, whether he could induce her to accept the hospitality of his own roof during the years of compulsory solitude that in all probability lay in front of her. She would be practically homeless, and he feared that she would have very little money; her husband had fallen into inescapable disgrace, and there was the child to inherit the stigma of his father's shame. Yet she had made no complaint, had pleaded neither for pity nor aid. The stifling, evil-smelling, airless room in Queen Elizabeth Street rose up before him—a poignant memory. It had seemed for her such a hideously sordid environment. In his quiet scholar's life, gazing out upon the unchanging aspect of the Cotswolds, whose familiar forms were passionately dear to him, he had been little mixed up with the affairs, tragic or otherwise, of the outside world. The terrible paraphernalia that hedged about the retinue of Justice was completely novel to him; he had not,

like many persons, gone to see as a kind of show those scenes which meant the torture and shame of a fellow-creature. Everything had combined to bewilder him a little, and it was with a sigh of relief that he approached in his motor the long, gray outline of Cold Mead, its gabled roofs and fine chimneys showing their pale shapes against the dark background of immemorial elms that sheltered the house from the north.

A flat and velvet-like lawn of green smoothness stretched in front of the house, and then sloped gently down toward the River Colne, which, calm and opal-colored in the evening light, faithfully reflected the trees that overshadowed it on the further bank and the pink mists of blossoming Ragged Robins.

The roses that clambered in gay profusion up the sides and round the windows of the old house mingled their delicate fragrance with the more pungent scents of the stocks and jessamine. The freshness of the air, combined with the odors of the flowers, revived Stephen after his long, tedious journey. Yet once more before his unwilling vision the little room rose up; he remembered the smell of stale food floating thickly up the stairs, and in the midst of the scene of squalor he saw again with terrible distinctness his brother's two victims—Frances and David.

The door was opened, and a girl's form appeared on the threshold. She ran toward him. This was his only child, Doris Amory, now in her eleventh year. Stephen had married rather late in life a woman much younger than himself; she had died when her child was born.

"You did not bring David back with you, dad?" she said, putting up her face to be kissed.

"No, my dear—I couldn't get him to come. He wouldn't leave his mother. Perhaps later on——"

Doris was tall for her age and thin. She resembled her mother, and promised to be almost as pretty, with her masses of red-gold hair and big blue eyes. In a sense she represented all that Stephen desired his daughter to be; she was quiet, well mannered, had dainty, pretty ways, and was never noisy nor untidy; above all, she never approached him with dirty hands or face. She seemed a good child. He hoped that when she grew up she would become a nun. So many of the Amorys had entered religion. Doris had, however, settled in her own mind that when she grew up she should marry Arthur, Drayton Amory's son, who had so often been her companion during his holidays.

With a child's quick instinct she wondered if anything had happened, for her father looked grave and sad, as well as tired. She took his hand in hers, and they entered the old house together.

"By the way, Doris, your Aunt Gwenmy is coming down by the last train—she's arriving from abroad. Drayton's waiting to bring her down."

Stephen had summoned a family council; he felt that the situation demanded it, and he had unlimited faith in Drayton's judgment.

"But you mustn't sit up, of course," he said;

"we must have dinner by ourselves. I shall be ready in about a quarter of an hour."

But she still held his hand.

"Has anything happened, dad?"

He looked down at her and ran his fingers through the silken, red-gold curls.

"Why? Has anyone been saying anything to you, Doris?"

"I did hear the servants saying something about Mr. Aubrey's being in for it," she said, flushing. "What did they mean? What has Uncle Aubrey done?"

"Don't ask me now, please, and don't talk about it, there's a good child. I suppose you'll have to know all about it later on. Your Aunt Frances and David are in great trouble and very unhappy. You must pray for them all, Doris."

He went slowly upstairs. So the affair was being discussed openly among the servants. A stinging sense of shame possessed him; it was a sentiment of which, in his cultivated detachment, he had believed himself incapable. But his brother's disgrace had touched him too nearly; he felt as if the hand of God lay heavily upon him.

He was sitting alone in his study about ten o'clock that night, when a sound of carriage-wheels was heard in the drive, followed by a loud ring at the bell and a stir of footsteps and voices in the hall. "That must be Gwenny and Drayton," he said to himself. He rose, put down his book with a sigh, and went out to receive them. Lady Orme came quickly up to her brother and kissed him. "Dear Stephen," she

said, "I came as quickly as I could. I left poor Justin to finish his cure—he promised faithfully to do everything he was told!"

She was a good many years younger than Stephen, being even now less than fifty-five years old. She was eager, impressionable, impulsive, and warm-hearted, full of sympathetic discernment; she was still, as she had always been, a graceful and pretty woman, with charming ways and a soft, agreeable voice.

Beside her stood Drayton Amory, with his sharp, bitter face that belied so constantly his innate kindness of heart. His acid tongue and appalling gift of mimicry made him a terror to people who did not know how much real unselfishness lay concealed beneath that cynical exterior.

Lady Orme flung off her light dust-colored traveling-wrap, disclosing a dress of soft gray muslin. "Have you seen poor Frances?" she said; "and does David know anything? Drayton can tell me nothing—he has not stirred from that dreadful court, he tells me!"

They followed Stephen into his study. "David knew more than his mother suspected," said Stephen. "He heard a noise, and got out of bed that night, and saw the detectives taking Aubrey away."

Lady Orme put her hand up to her face with a quick gesture of pain. "Poor little boy!" she said softly. "And Frances—how does she bear it?"

"She seemed rather stunned," said Stephen; "she is very quiet—quite uncomplaining. She

did not speak of herself. I can't tell how much of this was a surprise to her, but I don't believe she ever suspected there was anything wrong. Aubrey never talked about business to her. But, Gwenny, you must come and have something to eat. I was forgetting—and after your long journey, too.”

“I had something to eat in Paris,” she said, “but it seems ages since I left Vichy, and the trains were so hot and crowded. I should like some soup, and something fizzy with ice in it to drink.”

“So should I,” said Drayton gloomily, speaking for the first time.

They went into the dining-room, where a footman was waiting to serve them with a belated dinner.

“I didn't let Doris sit up,” said Stephen presently. “You'll see her in the morning, Gwenny. I only came back this evening myself.”

The meal was a hurried one, neither Gwendolyn nor Drayton giving much evidence of appetite. They were longing to be alone with Stephen, so as to be able to discuss matters, now rendered impossible by the presence of two men-servants. All three were glad when dinner was over, and they could return to Stephen's study, with its two long French windows opening out upon the lawn, whence all kinds of refreshing flower-scents stole agreeably into the room. Gwendolyn sat on a low chair with her feet on the stone sill, looking out into the night. There was a moon, and its silver touched the Colne as if with a polishing finger; the bright glimpse

of the river showed in curious contrast to the dark shapes of the trees and hills that lay beyond it, and the ebony shadows flung by the old house. It was very still, but sometimes a night-owl flew past with its desolate, melancholy cry.

"What a beautiful night!" said Lady Orme softly.

"Yes," said her brother. "I only wish I could have persuaded Frances and David to come back with me. But she wouldn't leave town, and David absolutely refused to leave her. He adores his mother, and is afraid the men will come and take her away, too, if he doesn't stay to protect her." He thought with sadness of this boy, so full of fair promise, with this goodly heritage of Cold Mead awaiting him, as well as that other heritage bequeathed by his father's disgrace.

"But he must come later—with Frances," said Gwendolyn.

"Later" meant when all their fears should be merged in the dreadful certainty of Aubrey's public disgrace and dishonor—when his condemnation had been followed by his disappearance into the limbo of penal servitude. Then, if ever, his wife and child would need a secure and sheltered asylum.

She put out her hand and sought Stephen's. "And did you see Aubrey?"

"Only in court yesterday. He wouldn't see me," said Stephen.

"What did he look like?"

"Very pale and anxious. A little frightened later—there was a great crowd outside, you

know, Gwenny, and they hissed him. I never saw such a mob! Some of them looked as if they would like to tear him in pieces. It was the only time when he showed any—any emotion. It was what the papers call a hostile demonstration.”

Gwendolyn shuddered. “Then, I suppose, there is really no doubt?” she said.

“No doubt at all,” said Drayton in his dry, harsh voice.

He stood there, a long, lean figure, a cigarette between his thin lips; he looked over the heads of Gwendolyn and Stephen at the silver wonder of the Colne, glinting under the shadows of the trees. “No doubt at all,” he repeated.

“And what are you going to do, Stephen?”

“I can do nothing,” said Stephen. “They seem very reluctant to give bail. But if they do, it will be for a very large sum—and I have promised Frances I’ll do my best.” He stopped short. “And you—I thought you’d help too, Gwenny—they will want two sureties.”

“Of course, I’ll help,” said Lady Orme. “I’d do anything for Frances. Oh, why didn’t Aubrey come and tell you long ago that he was in difficulties?”

Stephen said grimly: “It would have been better.”

“Aubrey had the unconquerable hopefulness of all gamblers,” said Drayton; “such a temperament is a curse. I never knew any one so hopeful, so optimistic. Even now he is not at all downcast—now that he has got over the first shock of his arrest. It *was* a shock—he couldn’t

realize it at first—it was a facer, even for Aubrey. I find it very difficult to regard Aubrey as a grown-up person—he has the heart of a boy. He must be getting on to thirty-five, and one would think, to hear him talk, he was nineteen!”

He blew a thin, blue wreath of smoke into the air.

“I had a visit to-day,” he continued, “from our worthy cousins—the Sampsons. Ah, what a woman, Stephen! I would have escaped them if I could, but they came to my chambers, where I was finishing up some work. Mrs. Sampson had been to see poor Frances—so she told me. She seemed to think that Frances and David ought to be arrested too, because they belong to Aubrey! She said, among other things, ‘Of course, there is no hope for David!’ I asked her what she meant. She said there was no doubt he would inherit his father’s disposition, and what could one expect of the child of a criminal and of a woman with French blood in her veins!”

“Do you think she said these things to Frances, too?” asked Lady Orme, her cheeks flushed with anger.

“I gathered from Frances that she had been a little trying,” said Stephen, “and had begged to be reassured on the subject of Aubrey’s innocence!”

“Poor Frances,” said Gwendolyn, with a catch in her voice; “what a horrible tragedy it is!” She put her hand up to the soft lace at her throat, as if something threatened to choke her. “What will be the end of it?”

“We cannot deceive ourselves,” said Stephen,

“and Drayton will tell you the same thing. Aubrey cannot escape punishment—he is a ruined man—ruined and disgraced. Frances has her little property in Algeria. It doesn’t bring her in a great deal; still, she will have enough to live upon, and I shall pay for David’s education. I’m sure she will let me do that.”

“Well, I shall leave you two to talk,” said Gwendolyn, rising. “I am very tired, Stephen. I will go to bed.” She kissed her brother and held out a small, cold hand to Drayton. “You are a brick, Drayton,” she said; “you’re doing all you can. But it is rather horrible, is it not?”

CHAPTER VI

IN openly declaring her conviction that there was no hope for David, Mrs. Sampson Amory had probably only articulated the unspoken dictum of the world at large.

It is a noteworthy fact that the children of great criminals almost always disappear. Probably their obscurity is rendered the more complete by the changing of the disgraced name into one which of itself will suggest neither singularity nor unenviable notoriety. These secrets are curiously well kept, especially when one reflects that their immediate entourage must be perfectly aware of the identity of the persons concerned.

But for David there could be no escape from the position he would be called upon in the future to occupy. He would inherit a definite place in the world, and he would always have to endure the bitter knowledge that he was the son of a man convicted of fraud and embezzlement. Stephen, remembering this, could not but behold the future of the boy in a mirror of misgiving, darkly.

When Gwendolyn had left them he and Drayton sat for some time in absolute silence. At last he said:

"What about the defense, Drayton?"

"Oh, I'll see to that! I have got Jephson to undertake it. His fee is a stiff one, but we shall

be able to manage it between us. I've been looking into things," he went on. "Hitherto I've been inclined to regard Aubrey as a plausible knave. Now I find it is the old story—a fool and his folly! I can always appreciate a thorough-going knave!"

"But he must have done it deliberately," said Stephen.

"He was a past master in self-deception," said Drayton. "And he never said a word to Frances, who could certainly have helped him. If I had ever fallen in love," he continued, forgetting that the fact of his appalling youthful indiscretion was so well known to his cousin, "it would have been with Frances. A charming woman and beautiful. Worth a thousand Aubreys!"

Stephen was silent.

"Mrs. Sampson is all for starving them out. I told her about Jephson, and she said it would be throwing good money after bad. She suggested, too, all kinds of horrible consequences if you had David down here and let him associate with Doris. At the end I lost my temper, and asked her to go away because I was busy." He smiled at the remembrance. "I also asked her not to go and see Frances again. I told her that her visit had upset her very much."

He lit another cigarette, and threw the extinguished match upon the path. "Aubrey will get it hot for this," he said; "but he won't be punished for the worst thing he has ever done—breaking Frances's heart and ruining the life of the most beautiful woman in the world!"

He spoke with such cold indifference that his words lost a little of their emphasis; it was difficult to believe that he was in earnest, his tones were so passionless.

"And—there is David," said Stephen quietly; "you forget David."

"I thought you detested boys," said Drayton.

"So I do, as a rule. But—this one——"

Drayton looked at him curiously.

"It won't do to be too soft, Stephen."

"I mean to do all I can for him—to make up to him."

"Playing amateur Providence," sneered Drayton. "Why don't you listen to the sound common-sense of Mrs. Sampson?"

Stephen's brow darkened. "David is an Amory—and my heir," he said.

"We are an effete race," said Drayton, with bitterness. "The downfall of Aubrey is our downfall. We have no future." He spoke with melancholy pessimism. "Sooner or later this comes to all families—as to all empires. Hasn't this already tainted the future of our children, Stephen? Doris, and my boy, and David?"

"Oh, I know—I know, Drayton. Don't dot too many of the 'i's.' It hurts me to think of it. Yes—it has fallen on my Doris, too."

"I hope she will never marry an Amory," said Drayton, "either Arthur or David. New blood and a clean name. You've kept your nose too deep in religion all these years, Stephen, to the detriment of your worldly wisdom. Make your will. Prevent Doris from marrying either of her cousins. She'd have to get a dispensation,

in any case—they are both within the prohibited degree! Hedge her round with thorns like the princess in the fairy tale. Shut her up in your owl-haunted Cold Mead tower—the Folly, don't they call it? And God send she may escape the fatal prick. Well, good night, Stephen. I've got some papers to look through, so I must go up to my room!"

"Good night, Drayton," said Stephen Amory.

When his cousin had gone he went back to the writing-table, and sitting down, leaned his head wearily on his hand, in an attitude of exhaustion. The world without was playing a great drama; men and women were toying irresponsibly with each other's destinies; careless hands pulled at the web of fate, and found its strands too closely twisted to yield to their importunity. There were sounds of laughter and crying, of anger, hatred, revenge; the voices of pity, compassion, and forgiveness seemed to be hushed. Love and death lay clasped in saddest embrace. And in the midst of it all his wife's young, thrilling voice seemed to come to him, echoing, as it were, from some unknown fastness beyond the hills of death, crying piteously to him to shield her child from the prick that would bring her woe.

"Yes," he said aloud, "Drayton is quite right—she ought never to marry an Amory. I used to wish, though, that she and David were not first cousins, so that she could have married him, and gone on living at Cold Mead. Now it is out of the question."

He paused, and looked out at the pale, moon-

flooded sky, at the silver glimpses of the Colne. So disaster had fallen on the old house, and he had been powerless to avert it. Never before had it been associated with any stigma of shame. He closed the window and drew down the blind. Then he went upstairs, crossed a long corridor, and descended a small flight of stairs, of which the wooden treads were worn and uneven. Taking a key from his pocket, he opened a small iron door and noiselessly entered the chapel. A red light burned before the Tabernacle on the Altar, beneath which in a tiny crypt the relics of the Amory who had been a martyr were enshrined. It had been Stephen's custom, ever since he could remember, to go there and pray before he retired for the night. And as he had offered all things, his daily comings-in and goings-out, his uprisings and down-lyings, the joy and sadness, the work and leisure, the successes and disappointments of each succeeding day, to the Divine Heart, so now in the midst of his heavy sorrow he offered this shame which had come upon him, this bitter trial which overshadowed his house. To-night he remained there till the mosaic of light and shadow made by the moon had faded into the gray, cold crepuscule of dawn, and a golden gleam of sunshine lit the altar with a strange glory.

CHAPTER VII

LADY ORME and Drayton Amory found themselves on the following morning the sole occupants of the dining-room, where breakfast was laid. Doris always had hers early with her governess, and had now gone out; Stephen was resting after his long vigil, which had only been interrupted by the entrance of the priest to say Mass. Stephen had served the Mass, as usual, and then retired to his own room. He was worn out.

Every one had assembled in the little chapel at eight o'clock. Gwendolyn and Drayton, Doris and her governess, most of the servants, and some of the people on the estate. The little colony at Cold Mead was almost exclusively Catholic, and on Sundays the chapel was full to overflowing.

They all knew by this time that a heavy trouble threatened the peace of the house of Amory. Not a few prayed that it might yet, by some unexpected and happy circumstance, be averted. They noticed the altered and haggard looks of the "master;" that bent, frail figure seemed to be imbued with a new and pathetic interest. They found it difficult—especially the older ones—to believe ill of "Mr. Aubrey," who had charmed them all on his rare visits to Cold Mead with his winning ways, his generosity, his eager sympathy. They could not easily associate him with

the heartless monster depicted by the halfpenny press.

"Where is Stephen?" said Drayton.

"He isn't coming down," said Lady Orme, pouring out some coffee and handing the cup to Drayton. "He is very tired. He spent all night in the chapel."

Drayton shrugged his shoulders. He was himself a faithful son of the Church, but he regarded Stephen's piety as somewhat exaggerated. He had thought him looking ill and tired this morning. No wonder—after a whole night of prayer and vigil, following upon the exhausting emotions of the past few days. He made no comment, for he knew that in Gwendolyn's eyes everything that Stephen did was perfect.

The windows were wide open, and the garden lay bathed in golden sunshine. An arch of Dorothy Perkins made a pink frame for the long vista of greensward dropping towards the Colne. Beyond, the great beech trees offered a prospect of delicious shade.

"I shall sit out," he announced, "in some nice shady spot, where I hope there will be no flies. Will you come and sit with me, Gwenny? I do want to talk to you!"

"I ought to write letters," she said.

"There is no post from here to-day, so you can write them this afternoon while I am taking my siesta, and I will post them for you in town to-morrow."

"Very well. Where are you going to sit?"

"Over there." He nodded towards the beech trees.

She saw him moving slowly and lazily across the lawn about half an hour later. He stopped for a few minutes on the dark rustic bridge that spanned the Colne at the bottom of the garden, and looked down into the clear depths of the river, to see if the fish were rising. He remembered that he had given Aubrey his first lesson in fishing here in this very place. What an apt pupil he had been, and with what dexterity he had learned to "throw a fly." He could still see the fair, flushed face, the bright eyes, the small, strong, flexible wrists. He remembered, too, how Aubrey had fallen into the river one day, to the utter destruction of a new suit of clothes, and how he, Drayton, had pulled him out, and carried the little, shivering, dripping figure back to the house. Yes—he had accused Stephen of being criminally indulgent, yet he himself had not been blameless in the matter; he had often in Aubrey's nursery days begged him off some threatened punishment, had once even come between him and Stephen's slow-to-be-roused wrath. And his friendship with Aubrey had always been as close and intimate as was possible between two busy men, each bent on shaping a career. A slow, sickening sense of anger against this man who had been of such brilliant promise shaped itself in Drayton's heart. More than any one he had been appalled at the extent, the unscrupulousness, of Aubrey's financial dealings. At first he had refused utterly to believe there could be any foundation for the charge, but day after day spent in the magistrate's court had pressed the truth cruelly.

home. There could be no reasonable doubt in any one's mind as to the guilt of Aubrey. It was impossible that he should escape heavy punishment. Drayton's musings, so sad and bitter, were interrupted by the appearance of Gwendolyn crossing the lawn. Her pale summer dress trailed after her; she held up a pink sunshade; it matched, he mechanically observed, some carnations that she wore at her waist.

"Well, have you found a suitable spot?" she said, approaching.

"I'm afraid I haven't looked for one yet," he confessed. "I've been watching to see if the fish were rising at all—of course they are not. To-night, perhaps, I might have a go at them! This part of the river always reminds me of Aubrey."

"Does it?" she said. She had been married the year before Aubrey's birth, and had known very little of him until he settled in London with Frances. She had spent a good deal of time abroad, for her husband had governed, with more or less success, some of the various island colonies belonging to the Empire. She had, therefore, fewer memories than Drayton of the pretty little half-brother who had grown up at Cold Mead after her departure from it. "I suppose he was a darling baby?" she said.

"He was a little wretch you simply couldn't help spoiling. I'm glad Arthur never saw me engaged in the process," said Drayton. "But don't stand here in the sun, Gwenny. We'll find a nice spot under those trees." He led the way, and they both crossed the bridge, and followed

a little path that went up through the woods to the left. Ferns grew there, and tall, white-spined foxgloves, that looked like an advancing army. Drayton flung himself down on a shady slope covered with thick green moss. "Will this do, Gwenny?"

"Perfectly," she said. She sat near him on the fallen trunk of a patriarchal beech. "I am thinking of going up to town to see Frances tomorrow," she went on; "Stephen says she is in such wretched lodgings. I am longing to get her out of them. What does she look like, Drayton? Is she changed?"

Drayton paused. He had assumed that expressionless mask which he had once been heard to say was the most effective armor a man could don. None seeing him then could have discerned in him the relentless cross-questioner, the tireless and fervid pleader of forlorn hopes and lost causes.

"She is changed, of course," he said; "but her beauty is quite extraordinary. Stephen seems to have the cause of David particularly at heart," he added. "That is a very laudable thing, but the less he has to do with his upbringing the better. He spoiled Aubrey, though he won't acknowledge it, and he will spoil David too, if he gets half a chance! However, he is morally obliged to help in the matter of his education. For the rest, he will have to deal both with Frances and the boy himself. Do you believe in Karma, Gwen? I do, as far as a devout Catholic may believe in such a doctrine. David's Karma was a foreordained thing—you could

have read it in the eyes of his father. But Aubrey blinded us all with his charm."

"We share in his Karma, then," she said sadly. "Aubrey bears our name—we share in his disgrace."

"You," he reminded her pleasantly, "no longer bear the name of Amory, so it affects you less; you are sheltered behind Justin and his Jubilee title! I am naturally affected, and so is Stephen, who cares very much; first because the name has hitherto been borne by honorable persons of good repute, and also because he believes, with some reason, that Aubrey is in a state of mortal sin, and has evinced no sign of contrition. Mrs. Sampson is also discomfited because she feels that the family shares, so to speak, will drop below par! Hers is a commercial outlook, fostered by long contemplation of the cotton market. She knows that her prestige, when she next visits her Lancashire demesne, will be at a discount! She need not be afraid! The position she occupies in the world is so obscure that nothing can ever shake it. The lesser stars in their courses do not affect the earth in its yearly passage through space!"

Gwendolyn laughed, in spite of herself.

"Henceforth Aubrey is our weakest link," he continued. "The individual achievements of our family will pass unnoticed. We shall hear nothing of Stephen, the philosopher and model landlord, nor of Drayton, the K. C., nor of poor Sampson, the solicitor's clerk, with his rich, stingy wife, sending him off to the office every day, though she could quite well afford to keep him

in idleness at home! We shall only be able to say, *Look at poor Aubrey*, and blush or turn pale according to the nature of our complexions!"

"You couldn't turn any paler, Drayton," she said, looking at him attentively, and falling insensibly into his humor. "And as for your capacity for blushing, I refuse to entertain it for a moment!"

"I could blush for many things, Gwen," he said, with sudden seriousness. "For instance, for Aubrey's inhuman treatment of Frances."

Like herself, his thoughts were unable to detach themselves from the unhappy wife, broken on the wheel of an inimical fortune.

"Oh, but he was always kind to her!" exclaimed Gwen protestingly.

"He didn't beat her, if you mean that!" said Drayton carelessly; "but he was inhumanly selfish. And he's gone on—with his eyes open—till he has plunged her into this hideous mire. If we feel so much for David, what do you suppose she—his mother—feels? To know that she has given the best years of her life to a scoundrel? It is no use mincing matters now, Gwen. To know that her child's father is a felon? That is the kind of cruelty Aubrey has meted out to her!"

"But she loved him—they were very happy!" said Lady Orme pleadingly.

"She loved him without reason. Passion—without wisdom—that is how disaster is spelled," pursued Drayton inexorably. "It is said that no

one can love and be wise. But one can be wise—and love!”

“You are very merciless to Aubrey, Drayton,” she said quietly.

“Oh, I wouldn’t say all this to any one but you, Gwen. I was sorry for him at first. I still think him more of a fool than a knave. But when I think of Frances I *am* merciless—I can’t forgive him or find excuses for him. He has wounded her to the death, and God knows what his selfishness will hold for her and David in the future. We shall never be able to save her from it—she won’t want to be saved. She’ll go on to the end, loving him, believing in him!”

“And how much better that she should,” said Gwendolyn Orme softly, “since she is his wife. We can’t get away from that fact, can we, Drayton? Any more than we can forget that he’s Stephen’s heir, and that one of these days he will be master of Cold Mead. I think that is one of the thoughts that hurts me most. I *love* Cold Mead, Drayton—it is in my very bones, I think, and no place has ever seemed so much like home to me. And we’ve always had a good and straight record here—a pretty clean sheet, haven’t we? I’ve always felt that Edward Amory, the martyr, was taking care of us all.” Her eyes were full of tears. “And now Aubrey can never take his place among the others; it’ll always be ‘forced praise on our part, glimmer of twilight—never glad, confident morning again.’” She repeated the quotation in a dull, mechanical voice. “We shan’t be able to forget that he is unworthy to succeed the Edward who

sang under the rack; John, who died in exile because of his faith; Stephen, who would suffer as they did, if he were called upon to do so!"

"My dear Gwen," said Drayton, "don't forget that there are such things as contrition, repentance, expiation. Don't forget that Aubrey may yet, by the grace of God, be capable of them. Oh, I know he's a long way off them now, but don't you think the prayers of his wife and son will bring him back? He hasn't practised his religion for some years—that in itself must have been a cruel martyrdom for Frances. Fortunately, he never seems to have interfered with David. You see, it wasn't like yielding to a single, sudden temptation. It was a deliberate, gradual process of falling lower and lower. We've only seen the final crash. Frances must have suspected for years that something was wrong. What a suspense, never to know its precise nature—this thing for which he had bartered his soul!"

As he said this he recalled his many meetings with Aubrey and Frances, but he could remember no sign of suffering or anxiety on her happy, serene face. Yet her quick woman's perception must have detected a hundred signposts telling her that danger was near. Perhaps she had even put out her hand unavailingly to stem the current. Now her sad eyes haunted him; they were mournful with dead passions, dead hopes, and seemed to plead inarticulately for peace.

He rose abruptly. "There are Stephen and Doris," he said. "I suppose it must be getting on to luncheon-time."

CHAPTER VIII

THE July day had burned itself out like a flame that expires. All day the sun had shone with pitiless force from a colorless, metal-like sky. No breeze had stirred to temper that suffocating heat. The plane trees in the garden at the end of Queen Elizabeth Street lifted their branches languidly, like tired arms too weary, too exhausted, to support their burden of blackening leaves. There were no children playing in the street, no fruit-hawkers crying their wares with raucous voice. The few people who passed by moved slowly, lethargically, as if without enthusiasm for the errand on which they were bound. A fetid odor floated up from the decaying scraps in the gutter. Sometimes a heavy dray went past with clatter of hoofs and grinding of wheels, sounding with thunder-like noise on the rough cobbles that paved the street. The horses strained wearily under the lash, as if they realized that their efforts would prove too feeble to avert its sharp repetition. Frances had always pitied the sufferings of these animals, but to-day she seemed to have no pity left. She watched them pass with their heavy burdens, their straining muscles, their sides quivering momentarily as the whip fell, but they did not move

her to vicarious suffering. They all seemed part of a world of suffering and pain, the needless pain caused by man's thoughtless cruelty. Her eyes were hard, and tired, and sleepless-looking. All day she had been waiting in suspense, wondering if Aubrey would be permitted to return to her for the few weeks that must elapse before his trial.

Since her first visit after his arrest he had refused to see her, and had sent a message that she was not to come. Each day she had the dogged hope that he would send for her. But he did not do so. He had made the same request to Stephen and Gwendolyn. Drayton had to be admitted. He had generally come to see Frances afterward, to give her news of her husband; but he had said very little. The affair had dragged on for nearly three weeks. She had been told by Drayton that probably it would be concluded to-day.

Presently a telegram was brought to her. It was from Stephen, telling her that Aubrey would come that evening. She read it trembling. He was to be free, then, perhaps for a few weeks. Drayton held out no hope of ultimate exculpation. She had asked him, and his answer had been like a sword in her heart. Now Aubrey was coming back. What could she say to him? How would he look? What would he say?

She went out of the room and called softly, "David—David."

The boy came, hat in hand.

"Are you going out, David?"

"I am going to Benediction."

"When you come back you will perhaps find daddy here," she said.

The boy flushed. "He is coming back?" he said.

"Yes. He will stay with us for a little. David——"

"Yes, mother?"

"You understand that he—that I—are still in great grief and anxiety. You'll be very careful, won't you, David?"

The child looked perplexed. "I will stay out a little later," he said. "You will not be anxious, will you? I shall be in church. And I think when daddy comes he would rather find you alone."

She said: "That will be best, David. Take care of yourself."

He put his arms round her neck and kissed her. "Shall we go to Cold Mead?" he asked.

"We must let daddy decide."

She watched him go slowly down the stairs. There was a church not far away, and every morning she knew that the boy got up early and went to Mass there at seven o'clock. He told her that sometimes he served the Mass for the priest. Once, after a sleepless night, she had also risen early and gone to the little church. She saw David serving Mass; she watched her boy's devout movements; she heard him making the responses, audibly, rapidly. She came away feeling that she had been watching a stranger. She remembered the old priest's words, "*The boy belongs to God.*"

She was afraid of the meeting between father

and son. She had told David no details, but she felt that he must be perfectly aware that his father had committed a grave sin. She dimly guessed that this knowledge had wounded him cruelly. All these days he had been very silent, and he looked ill and thin. When he remained out for several hours she felt instinctively that he had been praying. She never asked him where he had been. Even she, his mother, dared not intrude upon that hidden, interior life.

So she was alone when Aubrey came. She saw him drive up in a taxi. The sight of him made her heart beat violently; her temples throbbed like hammers. A kind of fear assailed her. She was afraid to meet him. She did not know how to console him. She feared to offer him pity or love. He was a stranger, divested of all those attributes with which her idealizing love had endowed him. She was to meet him with full knowledge, with full comprehension, of all those sordid and horrible things of which he had shown himself capable. She had tried with all her heart to believe him innocent, and she had failed. How could she meet him, and not find him changed?

But as his step sounded—even now so lightly, with all its accustomed buoyancy—on the stairs, she obeyed her woman's impulse, and went quickly forward, opening the door. "Aubrey—Aubrey," she said, in the low voice that was music in his ears. She put her arms about him, and pressed her face against his shoulder, as if seeking for his love and pity and compassion. The action stirred Aubrey to a quick tenderness.

He held her in his arms, kissing her lips, her brow. His kisses, eager and lover-like, seemed to obliterate all her sorrow in the present, all her fears for the future. She marveled at finding him so unchanged—so unsoiled. He was still the gay, handsome, careless boy-lover of thirteen years ago. She felt as if she had suddenly awakened from an evil, tormenting dream, which had no foundation in reality, to find herself back in the old world of love and security and happiness. Frances never forgot the mingled agony and bliss of that meeting, nor how they had sat there clasped in each other's arms, pitiful and silent, like two children who have been punished for some common fault, and would console each other for the pain inflicted upon them both.

She felt as he kissed her that she could forgive him everything because of his unchanging love, his unfailing tenderness.

"What have you been doing to yourself, Francie? Your eyes are like black pools! And this wrist—it isn't much bigger than my thumb!" He pushed back the loose, white sleeve, and his hand clasped the thin, soft arm. "Was it as bad as all that?"

She broke into pitiful weeping. She could not meet this mood of his with its passionate tenderness. It seemed meant for happy people, not for sorrowful ones. "Oh, Aubrey—it has been dreadful," she said.

"But it isn't dreadful now, darling," he assured her. He held her closely, as if he could never let her go, and she trembled and thrilled like a girl under his touch. "You mustn't let

yourself be unhappy, you know. I am not worth it. And, besides, I want you to be happy, even if it is only for a little while. I've come back—thanks to Gwenny and Stephen—and I want to talk about all kinds of things, in case we don't have many opportunities for discussing them together in the future."

"Yes—Aubrey?" she said.

"I want you to make plans for the future," he said.

For the future? How could she make plans, when it all seemed shrouded in nebulous darkness? "Plans?" she echoed.

"For yourself and David," he reminded her.

"I suppose we shall manage . . . somehow," she answered, with a sob.

"Francie, please don't cry. Try and forget . . . just for a little. I want to settle a few things, and you must really help me, you know!"

"Of course I'll help you," she said, controlling her tears with an effort. He had always hated to see her cry.

"That's better," he said, smiling. There was something enchanting about Aubrey's smile; it made him look like a boy.

His hands played with the loosened masses of her hair; he ran his fingers through the soft curls. "If you haven't thought of anything, I'll tell you what I'd like you to do."

"Yes, Aubrey?" she said, wondering.

"You see, you must put me quite out of the question. I don't count any more as a sensible factor; or rather, I shan't in a few weeks' time.

That reduces the problem to you and David. By the way, how much does David know?"

"He—he has guessed something. But he says very little."

"Well, when I am out of it," he continued, "I want you to take David out to Oued Zerqa."

"To the Blue River!" she echoed incredulously. "Oh, it's impossible, Aubrey! It's too far away, and I should never be able to come and see you. Even if the worst comes to the worst, I could see you sometimes if I remained in England! You mustn't ask me to go right away—it would kill me, Aubrey!"

Her words were full of passionate pleading. Her brown eyes, bright with tears, were turned to his in pitiful entreaty. But his face grew stern. All through their married life she had always yielded insensibly to his will. She had never thought about it much, so completely was her own will ready to conform with his slightest wish. She had had no experience of the consequences of defying or disobeying Aubrey. She had always been in absolute agreement with him. Now he looked at her with cold, untender eyes.

"You will be free, of course, Frances, to do exactly as you like," he said, with a bitterness he could not repress.

"You mustn't make things harder for me than they are already," she whispered.

He said coldly: "I asked you to leave me out of the question, to think only of yourself and David. You will be very poor. You couldn't go on living in rooms like these. It wouldn't be good for either of you. And out there you

wouldn't be poor. You could live there comfortably; the place is your own, the climate is good. You liked it when you were a little girl." He went on speaking as if she were an unreasonable child.

"Oh, Aubrey, please——"

"Don't think about me at present. Try and imagine that I am dead, and that you are left badly off. Wouldn't Oued Zerqa offer a solution? Then think of the time when perhaps I may come back to you. I want you to have a place ready for me. Is that too much to ask, Francie?" Again his voice grew soft, and he stooped and kissed her. "I know I have ruined your life—that I haven't any right to ask any favor, or to suggest any plans for your future. But I do both, because of the love we have always had for each other. I've thought and thought, and I am sure this will be best for us all. I want you to go as soon as you can—in October, perhaps. Will you promise me this, Francie?"

"I—I promise," said Frances Amory. The gray desolation of that future spent apart from Aubrey was already surrounding her with its cold darkness. She felt as if he were compelling her to sign her own death-warrant. She lay clasped in his arms; his momentary anger had vanished. It seemed as if her promise had unloosed fresh floods of tenderness, renewed caresses, words of unforgettable, magical sweetness.

"I knew you wouldn't fail me," he said; "you have always spoiled me, Francie."

She wondered how he could look so happy.

There was no sign of contrition, of grieving, in his face. His bright eyes seemed incapable of envisaging his own guilt, the disgrace and shame of his position. She felt that he was like a child whose joy it would be cruel to check by any chiding remark. She had expected a broken, humbled man, bowed down with shame, not this lover, eager, imperious, masterful, whose word must not be gainsaid, whose kisses blinded her to all sense of his guilt.

"I shall like to think of you safely at Qued Zerqa," he said. "I shall like to think of the time when we may be there together. We can start afresh, and live quietly there until we have to go to Cold Mead. Things will have blown over by then. You must try and look far into the future, and see the days when we shall be happy and together again!"

"But it—it may be years," she whispered.

"Drayton's been frightening you," he said, smiling.

"Not only Drayton——"

"You must be brave," he said.

"Yes—but there is David——"

Did he never think of David?

"Yes—he must leave school for the present. Make him work—I am sure he will."

"He is so young to work alone——" she said.

"Yes—that is one of the difficulties. But you'd better have him with you. What does Stephen say?"

"He has asked us to make our home at Cold Mead."

"Should you like that, Frances?"

"Not altogether. After having one's own house, I think it would be difficult, though I know Stephen would be very kind."

"I am sure my solution is the best one. I shall be happy in thinking of you safely settled at Oued Zerqa in the sunshine."

"I wish it were not so far away."

"The place is doing very well under this new man. He's a cousin of yours, isn't he?"

"Yes—a cousin, rather a distant one."

"He seems to understand it. I should keep him on if I were you. The house is empty—he said it was too big for one man. I think he has got a smaller one, not far away. And if you find you can't manage, I am sure Stephen will help you." He paused a moment, and looked at her. How young and sorrowful her face was! There were still traces of tears. "Have you forgiven me for all the ruin and shame I've brought you, Francie?"

"Oh, Aubrey, don't talk like that! It was my fault, too. I was extravagant—I didn't manage well——" She broke off sharply. How much of his recklessness had been in the endeavor to please her—to give her the things she liked?

He set his teeth. "If I'd only had the decency—the courage—to tell you I was mixing myself up with these things! I know you would have stopped me—you would have put down lots of expensive, unnecessary things. I never told you there was any need to economize! It's a little late in the day to think of you, but I do want you to make some kind of a life for yourself

away from England—something that won't hurt you too much, beloved." With sudden emotion he rose and turned his face away from her, lest she should see the tears in his eyes. "But you haven't let anything of this kill your love for me, have you, Frances? That has been my nightmare all the time—that has been the one thing I was afraid of!"

But she rose and came and stood beside him, and her hands drew his face down till it touched hers. Her cheek was wet with his tears.

"Oh, Aubrey—I love you—I love you always!" she said.

"But did Drayton tell you that I am committed for trial?" he said, facing her now squarely. "I am released on bail. Two sureties of five thousand each—it was a stiff sum. We've got to thank Stephen and Gwenny for this little hour, Frances!"

This time he made no attempt to check her crying, and she sobbed unrestrainedly in his arms.

CHAPTER IX

RATHER to the surprise of Frances, Aubrey made no objection when Stephen came on the following day and invited them all to return to Cold Mead with him. She had almost hoped that he would refuse, feeling that it would inflict needless pain upon him. But he accepted the invitation so carelessly that she saw her fears were groundless. Sometimes during the days that followed she wondered if he realized the gravity of his position. After that first evening he never alluded to his coming trial. All he seemed to desire was that Frances should be with him as much as possible; he would hardly, indeed, let her out of his sight. He did not even care that David should be much with them. He walked and rode with Frances; he took her for long drives in the motor, refusing the services of the chauffeur; the days slipped past on the swift feet of a happiness that seemed to Frances a frail, elusive, flying figure. She wondered sometimes at her own gaiety—her own lightness of heart, her own power of ceasing to think of the future in the joy of the present. She loved Aubrey, and she had never realized so fully, before how entirely she possessed his love.

It was on a Monday that they arrived at Cold Mead. On the following Friday, Father Peter came over from a neighboring Franciscan monas-

tery to spend a few days. He had known the Amorys for many years, and could remember Aubrey as a boy. They did not meet till dinner-time, and Aubrey's face hardened as he saw the priest come into the room. He had not been told that he was coming to stay in the house, and as a general rule he came over only on Sunday mornings to say an early Mass in the little chapel. Throughout dinner Aubrey hardly said a word. Directly the meal was over, he made some excuse for leaving the room when Frances did. He slipped his arm through hers, and she saw that he was very much disturbed and agitated. "What is the matter, Aubrey?" she asked anxiously.

"Why has Father Peter come?" he asked.

"He has come to hear confessions," said Frances; "last week he was not able to come on Saturday to hear them——"

"I believe it is a plot of Stephen's," said Aubrey harshly.

His eyes were very bright and excited.

"Dear Aubrey," she said, and her voice trembled, "it isn't a plot at all. It is only the most usual thing. There are so many Catholics here now, Stephen says he believes there will have to be a resident priest soon."

"It is a plot, I tell you!" said Aubrey. "And I believe you knew it, Frances!"

They were alone in the library. David and Doris had gone out into the garden; their little figures could be seen on the path by the river.

Frances took Aubrey's hand in hers, but he dragged it away with some violence.

"Don't you suppose," he went on fiercely, "that I haven't seen what has been in all your minds ever since I came here? That I am to have the opportunity of going to confession, because you all think I am in a state of mortal sin and that I have shown no sign of contrition? You know quite well you have thought this, Francie, and so has Stephen, and so has Drayton. And David—*David!*" He uttered his son's name with an angry violence that made Frances shiver. "And now here is Father Peter, who has known me since I was a boy, come with all his armor on to snatch the brand from the burning!"

She looked at him with sorrowful eyes. For some years past she had never mentioned the subject of religion to him. She had seen—who could help it?—his gradual and deliberate slipping away from the bonds of it; his significant renouncement of all practice of it. At first there had been excuses—journeys, business engagements, and the like. Then excuses ceased, and she had gone alone to Mass with David on Sundays. She had been too cowardly, too fearful of offending him, to venture to remonstrate.

"Have I not enough to worry me without having you all troubling your heads about my soul?" he went on harshly. "Why is everything made so difficult for a Catholic? Why cannot we be sorry and all that without having to say so?"

His blue eyes darkened and his lips were set in a thin, hard line.

"Because—for us it is not enough. The Church asks for more—a tangible proof—you

know all this as well as I do, Aubrey," she said falteringly.

"And I do not intend to give this tangible proof," said Aubrey. "I regard Father Peter's presence here as a deliberate attempt to coerce me. Stephen should have had more tact than to invite him at the present time. He must have known how intensely I should dislike meeting him! We were at home, and I resent this intrusion."

"I am sorry that he has come," said Frances. "I do not want you to be worried—or disturbed." His words had killed, stroke by stroke, the little ray of hope awakened in her heart during the past few days by his softened mood—the hope that here in the tranquil and devotional atmosphere of Cold Mead he would be moved to seek the Church's absolution for his grave wrongdoing. She felt that it would have given him courage and endurance to bear all that lay before him of punishment in the future, of shame and bitter humiliating disgrace in the eyes of men. But she saw now, and the knowledge gave her a fresh stab of pain, that no sense of contrition had yet touched his heart. His was a soul deliberately and wilfully separated from God; he neither wished nor would he seek for Divine forgiveness. Nay more, there was bitter rebellion and mutiny in his heart against the Church and all it stood for. The thought came into her mind that he looked like a beautiful fallen angel, flung down to the nethermost abyss, yet still crying aloud the words that had ruined him: "I will not serve—I will not obey." In that hour Fran-

ces forgot to pity him for what the future might hold for him of bodily suffering, of physical privation; she saw only the darker sufferings and more enduring torments of the soul that was blindly and wilfully rebelling against God. He had come to the cross-roads; he must choose the standard to which he would offer service; he must choose the king to whom his loyalty should be given.

"The thought that you are all praying for me is intensely disagreeable to me," he continued; "you are encouraging David to judge his father! I wish you would leave my soul alone. Why must you discuss my spiritual state?"

"I have never discussed it, Aubrey," she said, wounded by his words.

"But you hoped I should take advantage of Father Peter's presence here to go to confession?"

"Yes"—the word came timidly—"of course, I hoped——"

"You have no right to watch and pray and hope——"

Frances was silent.

"No one has a right!" said Aubrey violently.

His face was white. Frances never remembered seeing him so angry, so agitated.

"I suppose Stephen thinks I owe it to him because of what he has done for me. He will find himself mistaken. I do not owe him anything. And I will not see Father Peter again! I am not going to be trampled on and dictated to by every one, just because I've got myself into this horrible mess. If I had known that this was

what was in Stephen's mind, I should never have come down here!" His eyes flamed as he gazed at Frances with a bright, hard stare. "I know you have all been saying: *'If he would only see a priest!'* But I have no intention of doing so—please understand that, once for all, Frances! I shall go up to town to-morrow for the week-end and see Drayton."

He took up a Bradshaw and began to look up his trains with a feverish eagerness. The little distraction seemed to soothe him. Aubrey's anger was invariably short-lived, and he soon recovered his normal serenity. As Frances bent over the book with him he turned suddenly, put his arm round her and kissed her. "I—I didn't mean to be cross with you, Francie. You've been such a brick—you've never reproached me once!"

"May I not come with you to-morrow?" she said.

"Oh, I think I had better go alone. I shall have a lot to talk over with Drayton. I'll send him a wire in the morning. He wrote to-day and said there were one or two points he wished to discuss with me. You see, he can't undertake my defense himself, but he is giving Jephson all the help he possibly can. There is a train that leaves the junction at seven-forty-five—I'll catch that. It will be better than going to Cirencester." He put down the book and drew her to a seat near the window. For a long time they sat there in absolute silence, his face touching hers. His mood had changed, and once more he was the boy-lover of thirteen years ago, and she

the girl-wife surrendering herself to his kisses as if the world held nothing else for either of them. He seemed to have forgotten Father Peter, and his own harsh and bitter words and angry remonstrances. She had changed so little since those first days; she was still so beautiful, so loving, so, in spite of all things, loyal.

The shadows darkened in the garden outside; the big cedar stretched out its flat boughs in deep black silhouette. There was a moon, and the sky was pale with a strange luminous splendor; against it the trees and hills were almost sharply defined. They could hear the faint murmur of the Colne as it rushed over a distant weir. They could hear, too, the sleepy twittering of the birds and the sudden, prolonged, desolate cry of an owl hooting. But except for these fugitive sounds a complete silence enfolded them, and the isolation which love bestows wrapped them round as with a mantle.

On the following morning Aubrey rose early. It was a bright summer day, and the sun was rapidly chasing away with golden caresses the mists that had crept up like silver fairy-wreaths from the Colne, softening rather than obscuring the outlines of the hills. There was a heady freshness in the air, cold, pure, invigorating.

He woke Frances, who was sleeping the deep, soft sleep of a child. She looked so young and beautiful and peaceful that Aubrey could not at first bring himself to disturb her.

"Francie, won't you get up and come to the station with me?" he said softly; "I told Stephen

I should want the car at seven. He thinks we're off somewhere for the day, so when you come back you must tell him I changed my mind—that I've gone up to see Drayton."

Frances rubbed her eyes. The little scene in the library about Father Peter came back to her mind. "Of course I'll come," she said, sitting up and pushing back the dark, loosened hair from her forehead. "What a perfect morning, Aubrey. Did you order breakfast?"

"Yes—they will bring it up here."

An hour later they were ready to start. The motor had come round, and as they descended they could hear it throbbing outside. The door was open, and David stood on the step.

At the sight of his son Aubrey's face assumed a hard, set look.

"We can't take David, Francie! I want to talk to you. I shall let Cox drive."

"Very well," said Frances.

David ran up to his parents and kissed them. "There, that will do—you'll choke me," said Aubrey, extricating himself from the boy's embrace. "I'm sorry we can't take you, David."

The boy looked up with sudden wonder into his father's now smiling face. It was as if his gaiety, his nonchalance, were incomprehensible to him. Then, as if ashamed of this unspoken criticism, which struck him as disloyal and unfilial, he caught Aubrey's hand and held it speechlessly.

Aubrey patted him on the head.

"There—you're a good boy," he said. "You must learn to take care of your mother!" He

stooped and kissed him. "Good-by, David. I've never been unkind to you, have I? You'll be able to remember that among my redeeming qualities!" He laughed lightly, but there was an odd undercurrent of bitterness in the laugh.

David flushed. "Good-by, daddy. Shall you be back to lunch?"

"No," said Aubrey shortly.

Frances had already taken her seat in the tonneau of the car. Aubrey got in and sat beside her. They both turned as the car moved off, and smiled and waved their hands to the little solitary figure on the doorstep.

Aubrey leaned forward and spoke to the chauffeur. "To the junction," he said; "I want to catch the seven forty-five. We are a little late, and you must hurry."

The road lay across the hills; for the first few miles it was the identical route which John and Mary Amory had followed when they fled through the kindly mists of that winter morning and made their breathless escape from Cromwell's soldiers. On both sides the cornfields spread their rich wealth of russet gold, making a warm wavy line of color against the pallor of the sky. Somewhere far up in the sky a lark was singing its tremulous, passionate song. Once a covey of partridges, startled by the sound of the motor, rose from an adjacent field and flew swiftly across the road, vanishing a dark blur into the blue shadow of the woods. There was little traffic on the roads at that early hour, and the car made rapid and unchecked progress.

Sometimes they passed a little gray village

with small picturesque cottages grouped round the square tower of a Norman church, lying in the valleys and bosomed deeply in a nest of trees. Peaceful, happy little homes, from which the children ran out laughing and shouting to watch them as they passed.

They were in good time for the train. Few passengers were awaiting it at the junction, and Aubrey had a compartment to himself. He looked very nervous and excited, his hands were restless, his eyes hard and bright and almost fiercely blue. During the drive he had talked and laughed a good deal. He had kept his arm flung round his wife all the time, had bent down constantly to put his lips to hers in a long kiss from which he could scarcely bring himself to release her. And she had yielded in a very ecstasy of happiness, yet filled always with a secret wonder.

She sat with him in the train for a few minutes before it started.

"I wish you were coming, too," he told her wistfully.

"You wouldn't let me," she reminded him, with a smile.

His bright eyes devoured her. "My beautiful —" he said.

He held her then as if he would never, never let her go. Frances felt faint and cold with emotion; she shivered in his arms. A dull misgiving seemed to clutch her heart as if with iron claws. There was something almost strange and exaggerated about his caresses; they frightened her.

"Oh, Frances," he said, "I believe you love me—in spite of all things!"

She reassured him. "I do love you, Aubrey."

At last he released her.

"Now you must go. My darling—we shall meet——"

He did not finish the sentence, for Frances sprang down from the train, which had given a sudden movement forward. She stood on the platform. Aubrey shut the door, and leaning out of the window, stretched his hand toward her. She just had time to touch it.

"Good-by, Aubrey darling!"

She went slowly back to the car. She felt cold, and physically bruised with the pain of parting from him; it was a foretaste of the cruel separation that lay in front of them. Two days seemed such an immense slice out of the short time that remained to them. She could hardly bear to give him up for those two days.

She sat huddled up in the car, shivering, trembling. She scarcely saw the bright fields fringed with the flaming scarlet of the poppies, the yellow blaze of corn-marigolds. The sun was high in the heavens now, the breeze had dropped; it promised to be very hot. But Frances shivered strongly; her teeth chattered; her little hands lay on her lap like stones. She felt worn out with fatigue and emotion. She seemed to feel still the long touch of his lips on hers, the clasp of his hands about her. Oh, why had she let him go? She had never said a word to entreat him not to rob her of a single hour.

"Aubrey has gone to town to see Drayton,"

she told Stephen, who came out into the hall to meet her on her return. "He will come back to-morrow night or Monday morning. He said there were things he wanted to talk over with Drayton." She did not wish Stephen to guess that it was the presence of Father Peter that had driven Aubrey away from Cold Mead.

"I'm sorry he's gone, and Gwenny will be disappointed. I have just had a wire from her saying that she is coming down this afternoon. Why, Frances, how white you look! Are you ill?"

"I'm tired. We went so fast—it shook me rather. I don't like early starts." She smiled wanly. "I'll go up to my room and rest."

CHAPTER X

FRANCES was walking in the garden with David on the following afternoon when she saw the figure of a man coming from the direction of the stables. For the moment she thought that it was Aubrey, and her heart beat a little faster; she had begun to look forward eagerly to his return.

"Can you see who that is?" she said to David.

"It is Cousin Drayton," said the boy.

"I wonder if Aubrey has come back with him," she said.

She hurried forward; her eyes bright, her cheeks flushed like a girl awaiting her lover.

"Oh, Drayton, has Aubrey come with you?"

She was a little breathless from her quick movement. Drayton looked at her in astonishment.

"Aubrey?" he said. "Isn't he here? I thought he was down here with you—I particularly wanted to see him. I told him I should come down to-day to talk things over!"

Frances turned very white. "He went up to town early yesterday morning to see you," she said.

"He must have changed his mind then," said Drayton; "I've not seen him. Did you expect him back to-night?"

"To-night—or to-morrow morning," said Frances.

She remembered with a sudden sensation of pain his last unfinished sentence: "We shall meet——"

They walked back to the house in silence. Once she glanced nervously at Drayton, but his face had assumed that expressionless mask which gave no indication of his passing thoughts. Stephen, hearing voices, looked out of the study window. "Hullo, Drayton!" he said. "Brought Aubrey back with you?"

"No," said Drayton coldly; "I haven't seen him. Are you coming out, Stephen? Let's go and have a smoke under those trees. I want some fresh air. Is Gwenny down here?"

"Yes, Gwenny is here. I'll come out in a minute," said Stephen. He lit a cigar and came out. "I wonder where Aubrey is?" he said, looking puzzled.

"Perhaps Frances can tell us," said Drayton pleasantly.

"But—I don't know," she said. "I'll leave you and Drayton to smoke—I am tired——"

She went up to her room with lagging steps. Where was Aubrey? She felt suddenly as if an immense, an unbridgeable space, was set between her and her husband, dividing them utterly. The remembrance of their last hour together yesterday morning filled her with a vague misgiving. His words—his passionate kisses, his holding her as if he would never let her go. What did it mean? Why had he never gone to see Drayton? Why had he so suddenly changed his plans? A sensation of actual fear possessed her; she paced restlessly up and down her room. Something

had happened to Aubrey—he had met with an accident—perhaps even at this moment he was lying unrecognized in some London hospital! All kinds of wild imaginings assailed her.

Presently she looked out of her window. She saw a group of people sitting under the shade of the big cedar on the lawn. They were Stephen, Drayton, and Gwendolyn Orme. Once she heard Gwen laugh. How could she laugh now? Frances felt an unreasoning anger at her merriment. She could hear the low, continuous murmur of their voices. What were they talking about? Herself and Aubrey? She wondered what they were saying—whether they had guessed Aubrey's reason for leaving Cold Mead. If they did they would think him cowardly; perhaps they would blame her for not using her influence to induce him to remain.

She saw Gwendolyn leave the others and come across the lawn to the house. She was coming to fetch her—Frances felt quite sure of that. Gwendolyn's face was very grave. She wore no hat, and the sun shone on her red-gold hair. Frances wondered idly at the beauty of her hair; she was past fifty, and it had hardly changed color at all; it was nearly as bright as Doris's. Two minutes later a timid knock sounded upon her bedroom door.

"Frances—Frances——" It was Gwendolyn's voice.

She opened the door. "Yes—what is it, Gwen?" She trembled, even her voice was not steady; she looked at Gwendolyn with large, frightened eyes.

"Can you come down? Stephen wants to talk to you. You are not ill, are you, Frances?"

"No—I'm not ill. The heat has upset me a little." She followed Gwendolyn down the stairs, and they joined the little group in the garden.

Drayton rose, pushed a chair toward Frances. "Will you sit here?" he said. His voice had an odd, gruff sound, and she became aware that his keen gray eyes were regarding her searchingly.

"Did Aubrey give you any special reason for his early departure yesterday morning?" he asked after a moment's pause.

He used unconsciously the tone he was accustomed to adopt when cross-examining unwilling but important witnesses.

"Yes——" said Frances hesitatingly.

"And that was?" Drayton leaned forward and seemed eager to hear her answer.

"Must I tell you?" She looked from one to the other, wondering at their grave faces.

"I think you had better tell us, Frances," said Stephen kindly. "You see, we are all rather anxious about Aubrey—we are wondering where he can be."

"But when he comes back to-morrow you can ask him about it," said Frances, "if—if it is so necessary you should know!"

"Did he say he would come back to-morrow?" said Drayton.

"He said, 'I shall run up to town to-morrow for the week-end to see Drayton.'"

"He never said a word about going to town when he asked me for the car," said Stephen; "I

thought you were going out for the day together."

"I knew he was going to London," said Frances.

"And you believe that he will come back tomorrow?" said Drayton sharply.

"Yes——" she said, but even as she uttered the word she began to feel less assured.

"But you don't know at what time? He didn't say anything about being met?"

"No—I thought he would write—or wire——"

"And you won't tell us the excuse he made for this sudden change of plan?"

"He said he was going up to town to see you," said Frances evasively.

"But what excuse did he give for going away so suddenly without telling Stephen or any one except yourself? Do be frank with us, Frances—it will be such a help," urged Drayton, with a touch of rare impatience in his voice.

"It—it was on account of—Father Peter," said Frances, after a long pause and with evident reluctance.

Stephen and Drayton echoed simultaneously, "*Father Peter!*"

"Why on earth," said Drayton, quickly recovering from his surprise, "why on earth should he leave Cold Mead on account of Father Peter?"

Frances was silent.

"You really believed this reason, Frances?" said Gwendolyn Orme, speaking for the first time.

"Of course I believed it!" Her brown eyes flashed. And yet—why should she believe the

word of this man whom the whole world knew to be capable of infinite perfidy? Had he not forfeited all claim to be trusted? She had no right to be angry with Gwendolyn for asking her such a question.

"But why should he have minded Father Peter's coming?" said Stephen; "he comes nearly every week. Didn't Aubrey know that?"

"He thought it was a plot to induce him to go to confession," said Frances, still very reluctantly; "so he made up his mind then and there to go up to town and see you, Drayton. What can have prevented him? Do you think he has met with an accident?"

Gwendolyn turned to Drayton and whispered: "I told you that she knew nothing—nothing at all. Be gentle with her, Drayton!"

"I don't think he has met with an accident," said Drayton. "But I'm trying to find out exactly how much you know, Frances."

She repeated his words as if they conveyed no meaning to her. "How much I know?"

"About Aubrey. Where he has gone to—where he is now," said Drayton Amory, and his keen eyes searched her face. He either would not or did not heed Gwendolyn's whisper.

"How should I know?" said Frances, looking from one to the other in helpless bewilderment. "How should I know?" she repeated.

They were all silent. Drayton's face expressed a contemptuous incredulity. He had considerable experience of the ineffectual, reiterated lies which even good women will tell to shield the men they love. He saw in Frances the

common sight of a wife lying boldly and desperately to defend a worthless husband. And it angered him that she, of whom he had always held an extravagantly high opinion, should stoop to do this. Given that she was lying now, with such a beautiful, sad, and innocent expression upon her face, he asked himself how much she had always known—how far she had helped Aubrey, stimulating him to fresh extravagance—new speculations; how far she had been, indeed, his accomplice? Frances, wholly unaware of this cold-blooded and cruel condemnation by one who had always been her friend, said for the third time, "How should I know?"

"You know and you can tell us!" The words came sharply from Drayton. "Where is he hiding?"

Frances put up her hands to her face as if she had been struck.

"Oh, what is it?" she cried. "What are you all thinking? Tell me!"

Gwendolyn clutched Drayton's arm. "How *can* you be so cruel?" she said, her face flaming. "I told you she knows nothing. Why do you persecute her?" She rose and came over to Frances's side and took her hand. "You poor child, of course you know nothing. He deceived you too——"

Frances cried, "Deceived me? What do you mean?" What sinister knowledge did they possess? It seemed to her an eternity before Drayton answered:

"I am sorry if I have judged you harshly, Frances. But to put the matter quite plainly,

we think that Aubrey has bolted, and of course we believed that you had helped him to get away!"

He had hardly finished his sentence when Frances, giving a low moan of pain like a wounded animal, fell forward fainting. She was quite unconscious when Stephen, with an angry glance at Drayton, lifted her in his arms, and with Gwendolyn's help carried her into the house.

CHAPTER XI

As the days wore slowly on, bringing neither Aubrey nor any word of his whereabouts, fear crystallized into certainty, and Frances began to realize that her husband had fled from justice. At first when she woke to consciousness, and found herself lying on her bed at Cold Mead, with Gwendolyn ministering to her, she had the feeling that she had passed through a dreadful nightmare. Aubrey's arrest, his ruin and disgrace, his hasty flight, all seemed like a succession of imagined events that had no foundation in reality. But as she looked from Gwendolyn to Stephen and saw their sad and grave faces, the realization of the truth came over her with a fierce, relentless force. "It is not true—it is not true," she said to herself. She was sure that on the morrow he would return to her. He would never add this final dishonor to his disgraceful career. Yet what had he meant by all his passionate words of love, his strange and exaggerated caresses, and still more by his elaborate counsels as to her future life? All his urgent entreaties that she should go out to the Blue River with her boy returned to her mind with a new meaning. Yesterday, when he had held her in his arms and pressed his lips to hers, he was in reality bidding her a final farewell. Yes—he

had done it quite deliberately; had planned all the details with consummate care and precision, so that she had never once suspected him of deceiving her. This had been in his mind all the time, from the day of his release. This was the reason of his apparent carelessness in the face of his coming ordeal. He intended to avoid that ordeal, not to submit himself to it. Few actions of lasting and irreparable consequence can claim the excuse of being the outcome of a sudden, unconsidered impulse, especially when they are perpetrated by educated, civilized persons. However impulsive and sudden an action may seem to the onlooker, it is probably the result of deliberate and in a sense cold-blooded determination. There must have been first the weighing of the pros and cons, a difficult and delicate task when the balance must be nicely adjusted. There is—who shall say?—the drastic investigation of conscience and inquiry into the governing intention, if the person concerned is scrupulous. Finally, there is the choice of the path, which, as creatures alike of free-will and grace, is permitted to the children of men. And there is, too, that vast plexus of other influences stirred from slumber for the occasion, environment, education, hereditary tendencies, things psychological and infinitely determinative, whose warnings and mute advice form the basis, perhaps, of the most cowardly excuses advanced by man for his own wrong-doing.

One may hear of people being swept off their feet by a sudden single wave of love, hate, grief, or fear. To the onlooker the sweeping may have

appeared sudden, overwhelming in its violence; to the person involved it was probably the outcome of mature reflection, of calm deliberation. For was it not always there—this possibility amid the vast and complicated array of human possibilities—this little seed germinating in the soul? The reaping was the inevitable result of its treatment, the discipline to which it had been subjected, whether of encouragement or repression. Between the first bud of the blossom and the ripened fruit how many changes, how many perils, how delicate and gradual an evolution!

"It isn't true—it isn't true!" The words broke from her lips with a moan. "He is sure to come back—you are all making a dreadful mistake!"

"Oh, Frances, I wish for your sake that I could think we were," said Gwendolyn.

Frances never knew how she lived through the days that followed, with all their uncertainty, their suspense. She was very restless, wandering about the house like a pale, flitting ghost, as if she were continually seeking Aubrey. Drayton had gone back to town, and Stephen and Gwendolyn watched Frances covertly with anxious eyes. She took little notice of David. She pictured Aubrey as lying dead, the victim of an accident. He had left her this hideous legacy of suspense.

The bang of the front door that had always heralded his return, the quick, light sound of his footstep on the stair, his voice crying her name—these familiar and beloved things were extinguished for ever. He had gone without a word.

He had kept his resolution from her. There had been no refinement of cruelty which he had not practised in his manner of leaving her. She felt that this action belonged not to Aubrey, but to some unnatural monster who had usurped his personality. She had never really believed that he was dead. He had wilfully blinded her; her eyes had been too greatly dazzled by the bewildering sunshine diffused by his beloved presence to see clearly. She told herself that he had broken her heart, that she wished only for death.

She dreaded unspeakably the publicity that must inevitably follow, the loud hue and cry for the "wanted" man. The law does not permit its victims to escape so easily. There was the fear of his being tracked down, added to the suspense of her ignorance as to his whereabouts. He was an outlaw, a fugitive, an Ishmael, driven into the wilderness. A man upon whose head a price was set. Stephen, feeling the disgrace acutely, kept the papers as much as possible from her when the day of the trial came and Aubrey did not surrender to his bail. To the last Stephen cherished the hope that he would appear; that he would not inflict this final dishonor upon his name. He hoped that he had gone away because his position at Cold Mead was becoming too painful. A forlorn hope! It was a bitter experience for Stephen to see his brother's photograph staring at him, gay, careless, debonair, from the pages of every illustrated paper he picked up. Aubrey was wanted, and Aubrey was not forthcoming. He had slipped away into oblivion; had joined the Legion of the Lost.

He had disappeared utterly, leaving no trace.

Stephen remained in town till the formalities were completed. The money meant little to him, and he would eventually pay Gwenny's debt in full. He was staying with her and her husband in Chester Square till everything was settled. So far he had said nothing to Frances about her future plans. He took it for granted that she would remain at Cold Mead, and he determined to consult her as soon as he went back about engaging a tutor for David.

It was a wet October evening, and he was sitting alone in Sir Justin Orme's study, when a servant announced Mr. Sampson Amory. Stephen was a little surprised, for he seldom saw Sampson. He pitied him because he was so handicapped by his weak health, his general ineffectualness, and his vulgar, domineering wife. It occurred to him when Sampson entered the room that he was looking older, more bent, and more frail. He peered at Stephen with his blinking eyes through large, gold-rimmed spectacles.

"How d-do, Stephen?" he said, stammering, and clipping his words in his extreme nervousness. He glanced round the room, as if he suspected some one of hiding behind the curtains. "Quite alone, aren't we?"

"Quite alone," said Stephen reassuringly. "Sit down, won't you, Sampson?" He indicated a chair near the fire. Sampson sat down and held out his hands to the blaze.

"You see it—it is about Aubrey," he whispered. "Poor old Aubrey . . . d-done a bunk,

hasn't he?" Stephen winced. He disliked slang expressions, and this one struck him as unnecessarily crude. "I mean—g-gone off," continued Sampson, "failed to surrender. All these photos of him, too—s-some very like. You've seen them, I suppose, Stephen?"

Stephen bent his head in affirmation.

"B-bad job," said Sampson; "and you've had to pay up a stiffish s-sum—you and Gwenny." He rubbed his hands and put his feet on the fender. Stephen noticed that his boots were worn and shabby, and that his cuffs were frayed. "I wish I could help you, but you know how things are. The money all belongs to Belinda, and she is very c-close, she never gives me any. She says I already waste what I earn! But that is neither here nor there——" His inability to come to the point amounted almost to a disease. But Stephen's expression of polite and attentive patience was masterly. "Well, I saw Aubrey—that's the long and short of it!" he blurted out at last.

He announced his amazing piece of intelligence with a kind of boastful triumph, as if it redounded extremely to his own credit.

Stephen was completely taken aback.

"You've seen Aubrey? When?" he demanded sternly.

"Oh, about t-two months ago—some time last August—but I g-gathered from the evidence that it was later than any of you had seen him," said Sampson. "It was on a Sunday—he t-telephoned to me—that is how I know it was a Sunday. Belinda had gone to church—when she is

at home she never lets me answer the t-telephone." He smiled weakly. "Well, Aubrey rang me up. He s-said he'd come up from Cold Mead for the week-end, and asked me to lend him some money. I said, 'How much do you want, old c-cock?' He said, 'What have you got, Sammy?' I said, 'You can have fifty. Will that do?' He said, 'A hundred would be better, Sammy. You shall have a check directly I g-get back to Cold Mead.' I'd just g-got a hundred, that I had put by for a rainy day, and I didn't want to part with it all at once. Still, you know, it's difficult to refuse Aubrey. He had such a way with him, hadn't he? So he said, 'You bring it to-morrow, and don't let on to Belinda!' He was staying in a small hotel in Bloomsbury, and he said he didn't want people to know who he was, so he called himself Mr. Aubrey. I went the next day and g-gave him the money—all in gold—that was how he wanted it. He said he'd ask you to send me a check when he got back, because he couldn't write checks himself any more! He laughed when he said it—he was always a cheerful beggar, wasn't he? He didn't look a bit cut up. I liked him—he used to send me t-twenty pounds and a box of cigars every Christmas—never forgot it. And they were such ripping cigars—it is a pity Belinda objects so strongly to smoking, but she does, and she says cigars hang about so. Well, I never heard from Aubrey again. I didn't like to write to him about the check, thinking he might be offended. And then I heard he hadn't s-surrendered. He's let us all in, hasn't he? You, and I, and Gwenny.

But I liked Aubrey—he never forgot me at Christmas, and he had such a way with him, hadn't he? I never said a word to Belinda, but I thought, now it's all over, and there is no chance of their catching him, that I'd tell you, Stephen!"

"It was your only course," said Stephen sternly.

"I've been so afraid of letting the c-cat out of the bag to Belinda by accident," continued the little man, with a chuckle. "She is terribly sharp at s-spotting things. And she was against him—she used to call him and Frances stuck-up and purse-proud. She'd like to have clapped 'em all three into jail!" Stephen winced again. "So I said to myself, 'Sammy, my boy, you've just got to keep your own counsel!' You see, I'm a bit of a sportsman, Stephen, and I didn't want him to be c-caught. He may be a blackguard and a wrong un—I dare say he is—but he had a way with him!" And to Stephen's indescribable discomfort the little man's voice broke with emotion, and he burst into tears. "Belinda's talked of n-nothing else," he sobbed. "She's been saying what fools they were to let him out on bail, and she could have told them he was sure to b-bolt! What would she say if she knew it was my hundred pounds that helped him to get right away?" And he smiled a ridiculous, foolish smile, with the tears still running down his cheeks.

"Well, Sampson, let me give you a piece of advice. Since you have kept this to yourself all this time, you had better go on holding your tongue. Don't tell Belinda——"

But Sampson interrupted him. "Tell Belinda?" he cried shrilly. "Why, I've been in a mortal f-funk of giving myself away all these weeks. She'd never forgive me, and she'd tell every one about it, and say what a fool I'd been. I should never hear the last of that hundred pounds."

"You must give me the address of the hotel—I must make some inquiries. The whole thing is killing Frances, and I must try and find Aubrey at any cost." He went to the writing-table and took out a check-book. "One hundred? I'll make it two, Sampson. You can get some more—cigars!" He smiled. "And thank you very much. You were very kind to lend Aubrey money under the circumstances. I shall tell Frances. But you mustn't say a word to any one."

He saw Sampson depart with the check, looking rather as if he considered himself a hero. It was the first time he had ever ventured to have a secret from Belinda, and he was filled with admiration at his own courage and temerity.

When he returned to Cold Mead on the following day Stephen found Frances waiting for him in the hall. "The children are out," she said, coming up to him. "Have you any news, Stephen?"

In the last two months she had grown very thin, and her eyes looked bigger than ever. But since the first days her exterior calm had remained unbroken.

Her lips curved in a faint, difficult smile. She

felt now that nothing could make the worst worse; anything that happened could but fill the cup to overflowing, but never by any imaginable process could it increase its bitterness.

"You have heard nothing?" she pursued with unconscious insistence.

"Nothing that can make any difference now. If you will come into the library, I will tell you, Frances." She followed him into the room, and he closed the door. "When he went to town he telephoned to Sampson—to Sampson, of all people!—and asked him to lend him some money. He lent him all he had—a hundred pounds. He said he was coming back here the next day, and promised that I should send him a check for the money. Sampson heard nothing more of him until he saw in the papers that he had failed to surrender. . . ."

She sat down and leaned her head on her hand. "Is that all?"

"I went to the hotel in Bloomsbury where he had stayed under the name of Mr. Aubrey. But it had changed hands—the people knew nothing—they took over the place in September. They had the books, and the name A. Aubrey was written in Aubrey's handwriting, slightly disguised. That is all I was able to find out, Frances. But you must realize now that it was all premeditated, carefully planned and arranged. You must begin to think seriously about the future."

"Oh, I shall do what Aubrey wished me to do—I shall keep my promise to him," said Frances wearily.

"Your promise?" said Stephen.

"Yes. When he was first released he told me what he wanted me to do. He said I was to leave all thought of him out of the matter, and go to Oued Zerqa—to the Blue River. You see, I only thought he had made up his mind that he would be convicted—Drayton had told him he would get, perhaps, seven years—and he wanted me to have a place for him to come to when he was able to come back to me. I begged him to let me stay in England, where I should be able to see him sometimes. But he only said that I must not think of him. I see now what he meant—that he wanted to be quite sure where I was—and that, perhaps, some day when it was safe he could come and see me there—even if it was only for a short time!"

"You never suspected anything—even when he spoke like this?" said Stephen wonderingly.

"No—I only thought it rather cruel to make me go away like that. But he was not satisfied until I had promised to go to the Blue River. I shall go there as soon as I can——"

"Frances—it is impossible!" said Stephen warmly. "You must consider David. How are you going to educate him?"

"David must come with me."

"Aubrey had no right to extort this promise from you."

"I am Aubrey's wife—please remember that, Stephen," she said.

"And you are going to let him utterly ruin your life—and David's?"

Stephen looked at her. Had she been as wax,

then, in Aubrey's hands, to be shaped and molded according to the plan of his desire? "He is my brother," he said sternly; "but he was wholly unworthy of you. From first to last he has shown himself utterly unworthy."

"I am sorry not to do as you wish, Stephen," she said softly. "I owe you a great deal. Some day I will try and repay you and Gwenny. Of course, just now it is impossible."

"Oh, Frances," he said in a hurt and contrite voice, "you know I never gave two thoughts to the money."

"But you think it would have been more honorable if he had stayed?"

"Unquestionably," answered Stephen. "And better for his soul. Remember, his pride was still unbroken; he had never once expressed the slightest contrition. He is God's outlaw as well as man's. I would rather he had suffered punishment in this world, however deep and bitter the measure of it might be!"

"I think you are cruel," said Frances. "I can not look at it as you do. Perhaps, too, I think of David. He'll be spared having—a convict for a father."

But she seemed to see Aubrey's face before her, looking at her as he had done in the days of their first love, brave, handsome, winning, eager. She put her hand over her eyes, with a desperate endeavor to blot out the vision.

"I used to think, if anything dreadful ever happened to me, I should go back to Oued Zerqa," she said, after a moment's pause. "It seemed to me then that the only thing that could

happen to hurt me would be Aubrey's death. I think this is worse, isn't it?—this never knowing where he is. But he wished me to go, and I shall go—and take David." She went slowly out of the room.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN Frances Amory left London it was already winter. November still held her damp and foggy sway over the somber and sunless city, above which the thick and heavy blanket of cloud hung motionless. But in the bareness of the trees, the muteness of the birds, in the forlorn mists that wrapped the parks, blurring alike the trees and grassy spaces with an insubstantial if effective veil, the hand of winter was already plainly visible. For a few days past there had been a crisp coverlet of frost, crystallizing the roadside puddles, and sharpening each blade of grass to an edge like a tiny saw. Once, too, there had been a timid fall of snow—a few flakes that fluttered through the raw air, like broken-winged butterflies seeking refuge on the bare, inhospitable earth.

As she had told Stephen, Frances Amory had always felt that if anything should happen to her to overthrow things secure and dear, she would return to the Blue River, where her childhood had been spent under the care of her father and her French grandmother, an old lady whose adoring kindness she could vividly remember. She had known, when she contemplated such a contingency, remote and impossible as it had then happily seemed, that those wide spaces and

prairies, those immense forests and beautiful mountains of the African Tell would claim her. But in all her imaginings the manner of the overthrow of her happiness had never distantly entered. The crash had come suddenly, without preparation, without warning, and Aubrey had put the finishing touch to the ruined fabric by vanishing into the unknown. It seemed to her as if he had deliberately put this final barrier between them.

He had been the first hero of her girlhood's dream, and they had been married a few months after their first meeting; his devotion to her, eager and tireless, had invested Frances's romance with perdurable sweetness. Indeed, she had never once questioned Aubrey's love for her; it belonged to the category of immutable, changeless things as did her own love for him. Her father's death occurred during the first year of her marriage, a few months before David's birth. But in her grief Frances was sustained by the tender consolation offered to her by Aubrey. His sympathy held a new magic, a new charm, his compassion touched her with its delicacy; they had never seemed so much to each other before. They had been less well-off in those days, but at her father's death the Blue River property passed into Frances's possession; the increase of wealth had enabled them to travel, to entertain and to do many things hitherto denied to them. Aubrey had not then begun his disastrous financial career. It was fortunate that he had not been able either to mortgage or dispose of his wife's Algerian property, and it now offered to

Frances the refuge, the hiding-place, she so ardently desired for herself and David.

She had still this little place in the world, and she started to journey thither, feeling like a homing but wounded pigeon that can not fly far nor fast. Its own lair set deep in forest fastnesses is the normal goal of the hurt animal. And Frances Amory's green forest fastnesses seemed to be holding out loving arms to welcome her; she felt already the soft carpet of grass and moss and flowers outspread under her feet as if they knew how tired, how very tired, those feet would be. She could see the great hills colored like fading pansies watching over the wide plain watered by the Blue River. She could see the cornfields, the vineyards, the thick-growing brushwood, the olive trees clothing the hills like gray clouds. She hoped that David would like it, and wondered how he would amuse himself. She had felt almost cruel in taking him away from Cold Mead. He had been very happy there with Doris; they had worked and played together, but Frances knew quite well that all his spare time had been passed in the little chapel. Time after time, when she had gone there, she had found him alone upon his knees. She had moved quietly so as not to disturb him; sometimes she had thought he had not even observed her presence. *The boy belonged to God.* She remembered the words of the old priest, and for the first time perhaps she realized how substantially true they were. He slept in a little room near hers, and once she had been awakened by a sudden stirring, and the sound of a soft footstep

in the passage reached her ears. She waited, and after a little time rose and went into David's room. He was not there. She went down the long corridor and entered the chapel which was at the far end. A clock on the staircase struck two. Everything was perfectly quiet. But in the chapel she saw David kneeling by the altar-rails, his head bowed on his hands. She could hear the faint sound of ill-repressed sobbing. By the dim light of the sanctuary lamp, flickering like a red jewel before the Tabernacle, she could discern the boy's slim kneeling figure. His brown dressing-gown gave him the appearance of a little monk. Frances went forward lightly and touched him on the shoulder. "David, dear," she said, "David, dear——" The words came pleadingly. She knew as well as if he had actually told her, that he was praying for his father.

And David had looked up. "Yes—mother?" There was an unnatural brightness in his eyes as he turned and faced her.

"It is very late—I want you to come back to bed," she said quietly; "it is cold here, and you need more sleep."

He rose from his knees, genuflected, and went back with her to his room. Not another word was said between them, but he put his arms round her neck and kissed her. She held the boy to her heart. She wondered if she had done right to consider only his physical well-being. She dimly guessed that he had purposely intended to make this sacrifice of sleep and warmth and comfort as an expiation, even as certain Religious

Orders rise to pray in the middle of the night, breaking their slumber to intercede for the sinners who, in those dark night-watches, are defying God with their crimes.

It was David who in the succeeding days made all the arrangements for the journey with a wisdom that seemed beyond his years. Only one other person was to accompany them, and that was Frances's maid, Anna, who had remained in her service at the express desire of Stephen. He would be responsible, he said, for the extra expense involved, and indeed his sister-in-law's health was giving him a good deal of anxiety, and he felt that it would be imprudent for her to travel unaccompanied by another woman. Anna's fidelity was assured; she had only agreed to leave Mrs. Amory's service under protestation when Frances could no longer afford to keep her, and she had remained when requested to do so with evident willingness. A strong and capable Frenchwoman, she could be relied upon to take care of her mistress.

It was David, however, who made all needful inquiries about the journey, and brought back the little green-covered books from Cook's office with the slips of pink and yellow paper endorsed with the names of the places through which they would pass. Frances had glanced at them apathetically. Folkestone, Boulogne, Paris, Lyons, Avignon, Arles—she could almost see the broad blue waters of the Rhone flowing like a stream of light through the vineyards and cornfields and orchards of the Midi. Marseilles—Bône . . . and by that time she knew that she should see

once more the African stars—those beloved and remembered beacons—shining above her head.

Stephen came to town to see her off; his seldom-used house in Belgrave Square was opened for the occasion, and Frances and David stayed there for the last fortnight of their time in England. To the last Frances believed that by some means or other Aubrey would come thither and see her. She had convinced herself that he would not suffer her to go away thus alone without a word. She had never made a long journey without him since her marriage; indeed, she had never undertaken one alone, for in her girlhood there had always been her father, the most restful and kindly of companions, to accompany her.

She lay awake nearly all that last night, hoping and praying. At seven o'clock Anna's knock sounded at the door; she came in carrying a tray with coffee and rolls upon it, which she set down on a little table by the bedside. She drew aside the curtains, admitting the churlish and reluctant November light into the room.

Day had come—but no Aubrey. She saw now what a foolish, flattering little hope hers had been. Aubrey was hiding, in all probability, very far from England; he would never dare approach her nor write to her. He had fled, and there were people on his track. From time to time the papers asserted that the police were in possession of a new clue as to his whereabouts. No—he would never come, unless in the distant future he ventured to seek her at Oued Zerqa.

The boat-train was more than usually crowded

with passengers, and Frances took her seat without delay, with David opposite to her. Stephen, looking old and gray, a bent, fragile figure, stood on the platform. His solicitude for her comfort touched her, and he had insisted upon giving her a check for her journey. But she knew that he hated parting with David, and that he felt the boy's going very much. He would miss him at Cold Mead. He seemed to represent to Stephen all that he had in the past wished that Aubrey should be, all that Aubrey had never been.

It was very cold, and even in her fur-lined traveling-coat Frances shivered. She wore a thick veil, but it scarcely concealed her beauty which, in spite of the strain and sorrow of the past few months, still retained so much of its freshness and girlish charm. Once or twice the glances of her fellow-passengers were directed toward her with an ill-concealed curiosity. She had a great dread of meeting any of her former friends or acquaintances; she feared recognition even more than non-recognition with its galling humiliation. But so far she had mercifully escaped these chance meetings, and she had been thankful for her secure shelter at Cold Mead, where so little of the inevitable gossip consequent upon Aubrey's arrest and subsequent flight had reached her ears. She had been too indolent to read the papers, to inquire too closely into the world's opinion. An immense desolation of soul had possessed her during those intervening months, weakening her body and filling it with a strange lassitude that she was powerless to

combat. Now she watched the Kentish landscape flying past her with a mechanical attention. The empty hopfields, the green, sodden-looking pastures broken by the lines of brown hedges, the red-roofed homesteads, the leafless woods lying under the gray pall of sky, awakened within her a kind of indolent interest. But she was glad when they reached Folkestone and the fear of meeting people was over. She lay down on the sofa of her little cabin and closed her eyes. The boat moved; she could hear the shouts and cries of the sailors; soon she could feel the long rhythmic swell of the waves and the swift, almost eager response of the vessel as she plowed her way eastward toward France. Beyond her lay the vast sun-filled spaces of her Southern home—already its remembered peace seemed to enfold her. And in her dreams she could see Aubrey coming across the olive-clad slopes toward her.

When she turned her head Anna saw that her eyes were filled with tears.

CHAPTER XIII

THE property of Oued Zerqa lay close to the great forests of the North African Tell and at no great distance from the sea, from which it was, however, divided by a long range of mountains that in their varied and beautiful coloring possessed a certain resemblance to the Tuscan hills.

Frances found the house a good deal changed since her last visit, which had been on the occasion of her honeymoon thirteen years before, when life had seemed to offer her only a gracious and lovely prospect. For a few years after her father's death the place had been inhabited by some French cousins who, possessing a large family, had found the accommodation insufficient, and had added a complete new wing to the building. These new apartments were large and lofty and faced south; their great windows commanded wonderful views of the mountains. But Frances decided that she would prefer to live in her old rooms that looked out upon the wide and flat plain, in the middle of which lay the town of Azeba with its important-looking *mairie*, its official bureaux and the white spire of the church springing slim and erect from the midst of those low, red-roofed houses that clustered around it. In this town a weekly market

was held, and Frances could remember the happiness she used to experience when, as a little girl, her father used to drive in thither at an early hour, taking her with him. She could still see the streets crowded with Arabs, the boys, white-clad and white-turbaned, sitting before their trays of pink sweetmeats, their baskets of oranges and dates and flat, pale cakes; she remembered, too, the chorus of confused, unforgettable sounds that characterized those days—the lowing and bleating of the assembled beasts in the market-place, the cries of the native vendors, the soft fluting of the gezbahs, the harsh drumming of the tom-toms, the wild and melancholy songs flung to the serene summer air.

Standing close to the forest, against a thick grove of immense silver-leaved wild-olive trees, the house had a charming garden full of tall orange and citron trees, hung now with their bright fruits. Palms and Japanese medlars grew luxuriantly, and a group of erect blue gums, whose aromatic scents mingled agreeably with the forest perfumes, sheltered the house on the northern side. Below, the fields were filled with low, stunted vines, barren and desolate now, showing only the rows of dwarfed brown stumps, with here and there a patch of emerald wheat or green pasture-land. The white road that slipped straight across the plain was shaded with long avenues of trees—acacia, ash, and eucalyptus. And westward, beyond Azeba, Frances could see the sharp amethyst peak of Djebel Tam Gout, the Needle Mountain, whose finely drawn shape seemed so friendly and familiar a remem-

brance of her childhood. She liked to watch the sun set every evening behind that violet spire, when the dazzling gold of the sky turned first to rose-pink and then to palest turquoise before the sudden, swift, velvet darkness of the night blotted out that fugitive pageant of glowing color, and the mountains became shadowy silhouettes wrapped in the warm purple gloom of the African night.

Beyond the garden, to the north, lay the forest, a place of lovely mystery, of deep and shining glades, filled with the rose-red stems of the half-stripped cork trees and the thickly growing brushwood of myrtle, arbutus, and white bush-heath. There were few flowers at this season except the wild cyclamen and a few belated oleanders that flushed the glades with their delicate rose-pink, and the creamy clusters of blossom hanging amid the crimson, ripened berries of the arbutus. The tall, slender stalks of the asphodels were dried and yellow now, but in the spring the glades and open spaces would show mists of delicate pink when these "flowers of the dead" bloomed anew.

Frances stood in the veranda on the afternoon of her arrival, and looked out at the scene so tenderly painted in tones of delicate gray and green, the wistful coloring of late autumn. The sky was vividly blue, and Tam Gout towered aloft, a proud, upstanding spire, its slopes darkened with sapphire-colored shadows. It was a beautiful day in late November, and the wide plain of Azeba seemed to give back golden smiles to the sun that warmed it. The crystal clear-

ness of the horizon, the great space of sky so deeply blue, the charm and mystery of the forest, seemed to enfold Frances with a tender welcome. The delicious tranquillity and silence, the sweet, penetrating scents revived her. She felt already that, apart from the fact that she was carrying out Aubrey's passionately reiterated wish, she had been right to seek this solitude. She could build a new life here from the hopeless *débris* of the past.

Hafsi, the Arab servant who had faithfully served her father in the past, had welcomed the little party on their arrival. Under his superintendence the house had been swept and garnished for her reception. Big and rather bare with a kind of Eastern spaciousness, the rooms seemed to Frances a little empty. The walls were all washed with a distemper of dull cream, and the floors were covered with red tiles shaped hexagonally; the rugs and carpets were old and worn. But she had brought some fresh chintzes from England, and knew that with Anna's help she would soon be able to make the place look charming by covering the shabby arm-chairs and sofas with them, and making new curtains for the rooms she intended to occupy.

"Madame will not find herself wearied here?" said Anna, a little wistfully. Being Parisian born, the pavements of the *boulevards* were dear to her feet, and she could not understand any one wilfully choosing to live in the country, and especially in such a savage and lonely country as in her heart she dubbed the Algerian forests.

"Oh, no!" said Frances, her brown eyes kin-

dling as they rested on the beautiful vista of plain and mountain. "And I hope you will not find it too dull here, Anna."

Anna already regarded Hafsi with an air of unconcealed distrust. She was afraid of the Arabs—a people so treacherous and unreliable, according to the testimony of a ship acquaintance. She felt that here they could well be murdered in their beds, and who would be any the wiser? Hafsi carried always a revolver, and the accidental glimpse she had had of this weapon had unnerved her. She longed for the "sweet security" of Belgrave Square, and the presence so important and protective of Sir Stephen Amory.

David had gone out to make friends with the garden; his pleasure in his new surroundings delighted Frances. His bedroom was near hers, and Hafsi was busily arranging the "little master's" things.

That night, after David had gone to bed, Frances went out into the veranda which ran completely round the house, affording it shade from the great heats of summer. She went to that point from whence she could see Azeba, now only indicated by a row of brilliant lights. Above her head the sky stretched its wide dome of blue velvet, pricked with the innumerable silver lamps of the Southern stars. The wind rustled in the date-palms and in the grove of eucalyptus trees. Sometimes in the distance she could hear the harsh sound of a jackal's bark. But on the whole it was very silent—silent with the deep, profound quiet of great uninhabited

spaces. Frances had never before felt so completely removed and apart from the trivial current, the petty happenings, of life. The deep silences possessed her with a feeling of absolute peace. Unlike Anna, she did not regret Belgrave Square, nor Cold Mead, nor the gay boulevards of Paris. What she had sought in Oued Zerqa she was beginning to find. Its atmosphere was a healing one. She felt that it would teach her to forget the sharpness of her sorrow, the shame of it. She had been humbled to the dust, she had been made to feel that she could never hold up her head again, nor look any one in the face. Other women—the prosperous and happy ones—had perhaps blamed her in no slight degree for her husband's fall. Aubrey's hand, which had given her so much happiness, had robbed her also of all joy. She thought that there was something relentless and cruel about the manner of his leaving her. He had gone without warning, flinging her in the dust of the roadway. All these thoughts were present in her mind, but already they had lost something of their power to hurt and wound her. She realized this as she stood in the veranda at Oued Zerqa on the night of her arrival, and looked out at the star-filled sky and at the plain guarded by mountains, painted obscurely in the monochrome of night. There was no moon, but in the starlight the contours of the landscape, the shapes of the trees, the outlines of the shadowy sentinel mountains were dimly visible. The lights of Azeba and of the two outlying villages of Djendal and La Robertsau pricked the

darkness sharply. Here and there a lonely light gleamed like a jewel from some remote dwelling in the hills.

She went back into the house, and as she came into the hall she saw Hafsi standing there. As she moved away down the passage toward the stairs she heard him shut the big door and draw the heavy bolts; the dull sound of the bolts slipping into their places seemed to startle her.

She turned and came quickly toward him with whitened face. He thought that she was trembling, this calm, serene-looking woman with the grave dark eyes.

"Hafsi——" she said almost entreatingly.

"Yes, madame?" he said interrogatively. The Arab's face is commonly inscrutable, and Hafsi's was strangely emotionless and controlled under the gleaming white folds of his turban. He did not even show surprise at her sudden reappearance.

"Do not shut—do not bolt the door, please. Leave it—open——" There was a queer little catch in her voice.

"But, madame—in case some one should come in?"

He looked at her hesitatingly. Evidently the fear of thieves made him reluctant to obey the first order she had given him.

"Yes," she said, "in case some one should come in, Hafsi——"

Obedience prevailed. His "Very well, madame," gave no indication of astonishment. He slipped back the bolts, turned the heavy key, set the door ajar. The cool night-wind touched

Frances's burning face. She said only: "Thank you, Hafsi," and, turning, went up to her own room.

"Yes," she whispered to herself when she was alone, pressing her hands to her heart as if to ease the gnawing torment of its pain. "In case some one should come in. Aubrey must never come and find the door shut against him."

CHAPTER XIV

THE morning was so brilliantly fine and warm that Frances decided she would have her coffee brought into the veranda, and having chosen a sunny and sheltered spot, was sharing the meal with David when Hafsi interrupted them.

"Madame, M. le Comte is here. He desires to know if it would be convenient for madame to receive him."

"M. le Comte?" repeated Frances.

"Yes, madame. M. Jean de Vernay. He has ridden over from the Fontaines Chaudes."

Until then Frances had almost forgotten the existence of this person, a distant cousin of her mother's, the man who for some four years past had controlled the fortunes of the domain de l'Oued Zerqa.

"Please say I shall be delighted to receive him," said Frances. "David, M. de Vernay is our cousin. He lives, I believe, not far from here, and has charge of this property."

In her coat and skirt of rough gray tweed, with her dark hair uncovered, Frances looked very young and girlish. She had slept better the previous night than she had done since the blow first fell upon her, and this morning she had felt on awakening that the world seemed to pre-

sent a new and changed aspect, brightened and warmed by the healing Southern sunshine.

Jean de Vernay appeared a few minutes later, his name being formally announced by Hafsi. He was a dark man, about the middle height, and of spare build. His eyes were somber, and had the rather melancholy, almost fatalistic, expression which is so often seen in the eyes of the desert men. His face was thin and darkly tanned; he wore a small, pointed, black beard. He took Frances's hand, and bowing over it kissed it with a grave deference.

Having lost his fortune and estates in France through the carelessness of his trustees, he had found himself about five years before without the proverbial *sou*. He had not been able to adapt himself to office life in Paris, and had come to Algeria, hoping to find employment in the more congenial sphere of agriculture. It happened that Frances Amory's property was then in need of a manager, and her trustees applied to her to confirm Jean de Vernay in the appointment. He was, they assured her, eminently suited for the post, having had considerable experience in the cultivation of vines and olives on his own estates in the Midi. He had an intimate knowledge of Algeria, having frequently passed the winter there in his prosperous days; he could speak Arabic, and was capable and trustworthy. Frances remembered the careless way in which she had written to her trustees, telling them that they could give the appointment to Jean de Vernay or to any one else whom they liked. Her happy life in London with Aubrey had given

her little time for thinking of the far-away happenings at Oued Zerqa in those days. Some one must be found to look after it, to superintend the crops, to see to the all-important vines, to sell the vast quantities of cork, to direct the cultivation of the estate. Why not this impecunious cousin who seemed so anxious to obtain the post?

It was in this way that Jean de Vernay had obtained the wish of his heart. Refusing, however, to live in the big house, he had settled himself at Aïn-Safra, near the hot springs, in a small, unimportant-looking cottage standing in the forest at no great distance from the high road, and about a mile further away from Azeba than Oued Zerqa. His life was very lonely, but it suited him. Looking after the property gave him ample occupation; it provided him, too, with the kind of work he liked, and sufficient leisure for study. As a rich, idle man he had interested himself in the Roman remains scattered far and wide over this land that once had been part of the wealthy and important Numidia; he had even then begun to write a book on the subject, a task that still agreeably employed his brief holidays, when he continued to visit those places of interest that could easily be reached from Aïn-Safra.

The proposed coming of Frances had disturbed him not a little. She would be a near neighbor, one, too, by whom he was employed, and whom it would be impossible to neglect. The trustees in Paris had informed him of her resolution to spend some time at Oued Zerqa;

they also stated that she was coming without her husband, and gave him no reason for Aubrey's remaining behind. They did not tell him the exact date of her proposed arrival, and he had hurriedly seen that the house was cleaned and made ready for her reception. Hafsi had informed him yesterday evening that she had come—quite a week earlier than he had expected. He wondered why she had not communicated with him, never imagining that Frances had almost, if not quite, forgotten his existence. It would have been his duty to go and meet her at Bône. He had been unaccountably negligent, he thought, in making no effort to ascertain the day of her arrival, and in permitting this woman, so young and unprotected, and his own cousin, the daughter, too, of a man whom he remembered only with reverence and admiration, to land alone and unwelcomed in a strange country. It was not his fault, since he had been left in ignorance; still, he felt guilty as his eyes encountered hers.

She was very pretty, he thought, resembling her grandmother, whom he remembered years ago in Paris, though without her vivacity. She was dressed, too, in a charming, careful way. The delicate pallor of her face and hands, the soft brown eyes, the dark hair run through with golden lights, her smile as she rose and greeted him, agreeably impressed de Vernay, who disliked and almost feared women. Still, if one had to deal with them officially, and in the way of strict business (never, never, he resolved, would he depart from that most formal inter-

course!), it was certainly easier to do so when they were young, pretty, and charming.

In the garden beyond the fountain was playing, and the sunshine flashed in the spouting, gleaming water, transforming it to diamonds. There was a space of green turf about it, and a pergola showed some late crimson roses beyond. Frances turned her eyes away from de Vernay for a moment, and watched those showers of fragile, translucent gold flung ceaselessly by the fountain.

"It is so pretty," she said, "everything is so pretty here. David and I are delighted with our new home, are we not, David?"

The boy smiled assent. The sternness of de Vernay's face relaxed.

"I am glad you like it," he said, and his voice softened a little. "I am glad you find it pretty. Did you have a good voyage? They did not tell me which day to expect you, or I should have come to meet you. It is always awkward—landing in a strange country."

"But you forget it is not strange to me," said Frances; "the Tell and I are old friends! We had rather a rough crossing, and the boat was delayed. But we landed without any difficulty, and Hafsi had made everything ready here."

They all three descended the steps into the garden, and stood near the fountain.

"The Prophet, whose law prevails in this country, affirmed that to establish a fountain and to plant a tree were, after prayer, the two actions most acceptable to Allah," he told her, smiling.

"And whose acceptable action is that?" asked

Frances, pointing to the golden rain that sparkled as if a million diamonds had been flung upon it.

Jean laughed.

"The fountain is almost the solitary survivor of my own old garden at Avignon. Everything was sold, I think, except that. I brought it here, but my garden is such a humble affair I felt it would be more adequately placed at Oued Zerqa."

"You live near here?" A sudden thought struck her. "But you were not living in this house, were you? I haven't turned you out?"

"No, madame," he said. "I have never inhabited this house. It is altogether too large for me, and too palatial for a poor man. My gourbi is down by the Fontaines Chaudes, at a place called Aïn-Safra. When you have recovered from your journey, I hope you will come and see it, and bring your son." He looked with attentive interest at David, and came to the conclusion that he resembled the de Vernays.

"Oh, but I shall like that very much," said Frances. "You have grown fond of the Tell?" she asked, rather wistfully. "Or do you perhaps regret—Avignon?"

A shadow came over his face, deepening its melancholy. His eyes were fixed upon the grove of date-palms, with their fronds of ardent green lifted against the superb blue of the African sky.

"Of what use to regret, madame? What we have lost we have lost. Tears won't bring it back. I have learned from the Arabs to say *Mektoub*—it is written."

Frances looked at him with a strange little smile.

"I should like to learn to say that too," she said; "*Mektoub*—it is written." She repeated the words thoughtfully. "You must teach it to me."

"It is not an easy lesson—especially for any one as young as yourself, madame. And our word is a little shorter and far more beautiful—*Fiat*."

David looked up at his kinsman with a swift glance of understanding. But he said nothing.

There was silence between them, and they walked about the garden looking at the flowers and trees, and at the pale paths that led so alluringly into the forest.

"You will wish, perhaps, to examine the affairs of the estate, madame?" said Jean presently; "and if you disapprove of anything—or wish to make any change—you must be sure and tell me."

"I?" said Frances, completely bewildered at the suggestion; "I know nothing of the affairs of the estate! How should I disapprove of anything, or wish to make changes?"

"When you have been here a little longer you may see things of which you disapprove," said Jean coldly. "The place is yours, and I am only your steward. If you have any fault to find with existing arrangements, you will be frank, I hope, and say so!"

Frances said a little sadly: "I do not wish my being here to make any difference to you. It is true that the Blue River is mine—but I have

put the management of it in your hands. Do not, please, speak as if you were my servant."

"I am your servant," said Jean gravely. "I am ready to obey your orders. Hitherto I have only endeavored to guard your interests. But your coming has changed that."

Her pale face flushed a little. "Oh, no," she said. "You mustn't allow it to make any difference. David and I have only come here to find a little peace and quiet, and because it was—Aubrey—my husband's—wish that we should do so." She took David's hand in hers; they looked into each other's faces, and de Vernay immediately realized the sympathy and affection that existed between them. "We shall find peace here, shall we not, David? And perhaps M. de Vernay will allow you to ride with him sometimes?"

"I shall be delighted," said Jean.

She said: "He will enjoy it, and I am afraid of his not getting enough exercise."

"He can come with me whenever you wish, madame. I am entirely at your disposal," said Jean.

"Oh, I did not mean that! I mean—it would be very kind of you—if you don't mind being bothered with him. He—he rides quite well," said Frances.

Her servant! When Jean had gone, refusing quietly but firmly to return to luncheon with them at twelve o'clock, Frances found herself meditating upon his words. Her steward—her servant. He had said it with a kind of proud

humility. She had not hitherto quite realized Jean—this man who for four years had superintended her African property, had worked, week in week out, guarding her interests, attending to the crops, directing the laborers and overseers, and leading all the time such a lonely life in the solitudes of Aïn-Safra. Aubrey had told her sometimes that under “this new man,” as he called him, the income from the estate had increased, and the place had prospered as it had never done before.

Frances felt that there was something enigmatic about Jean. Closely allied to her own family by ties of blood, he had made it quite clear to her that he expected—even wished—to be treated as a servant. He was humble and respectful, desirous of carrying out her wishes. His call had been a very formal affair, and she wondered if he would ever become less formal and more friendly. She felt that it would have been a far easier position if the man had been of an inferior class; the attitude of proprietor and steward could then have been maintained. But he was a de Vernay, penniless through no fault of his own. His family was one of the oldest in France; he could not be without some pride of race. His presence seemed to complicate matters. She had never thought that there would be any difficulties about her living at Oued Zerqa. But that her only near neighbor should be a man, unmarried, scarcely ten years older than herself, and distantly related to her, seemed already to suggest that there would be difficulties. She was alone except for David. She was

separated arbitrarily from her husband, of whose whereabouts she was ignorant, and she felt that to know Jean at all intimately under the circumstances would be out of the question, even if he wished it, which he obviously did not. It was, too, a situation that might give rise to unlimited gossip—only here there seemed to be no one to gossip! Alone and practically friendless, she would have been glad to turn to some one for sympathy and advice. But to seek sympathy of this stranger with the cold eyes, the frozen, formal manner, would neither be easy nor would it be wise. She felt almost annoyed with him; his attitude, proud and yet deferential, exasperated her. So she was to give orders—and he would obey them! Even her timid suggestion about letting David ride with him had been received as a command which must perforce be obeyed, because it emanated from her. She could not help laughing, in spite of herself, at the remembrance of this brief and unexpected interview.

She wondered if Jean knew her story. Probably he had heard something of it, and had filled in the details for himself. Perhaps, even, he was ready to blame her. Frances knew that she had not escaped blame, that many people had found excuses for Aubrey, recalling the extravagance of his household. It hurt her, but she had loved Aubrey too deeply not to prefer that some share of the blame should rest upon herself. Her thoughts of him, her words of him, were still entirely loyal and loving. But she felt sure that,

when he had urged her to come and make her home at the Blue River, he had, no more than herself, realized the presence of Jean de Vernay. In the early days of their marriage he had had not infrequent outbursts of quite causeless jealousy. She had given up some of her girlhood's friends to please him. He seemed to resent even the fact that she should be admired. At a ball he had been seen to watch her with a devouring and jealous attention. She put aside these memories. He had gone away and left her without a word. Her goings out and comings in were of no interest to him now. Her very existence had been only an obstacle in his path to freedom—a freedom he was determined to possess at any cost. He had wished her to come here, to await him in ceaseless and agonizing suspense. But the memory of him, still so incomparably dear—the vision of his bright, eager face, as he bent from the train to say good-by to her, the remembrance of his kisses on that last morning—chased all hard and bitter thoughts of him from her heart. Yes, he would come to her here, away from prying eyes; he would seek her at Oued Zerqa. She must be patient and wait for him, and keep the door of her house and the door of her heart open to receive him again.

She went into the house and encountered Hafsi in the hall. It occurred to her to say to him: "Hafsi, did M. le Comte give orders that the house was to be prepared for me?"

"Yes, madame. Directly he knew that you were coming. The walls were all newly washed.

Everything was made clean for madame. The garden, too, as well as the house. M. le Comte was very particular."

"He arranged everything?" she asked, wondering.

"Yes, madame. He was here all the day before yesterday arranging the furniture—before you came. He did not think you would be here so soon. Every one worked hard to get the house ready—his own servants came here also to help. They were very busy. Madame, the Arabs are afraid of M. le Comte."

"Are they?" said Frances, and to herself she could not help adding, "I am not surprised." She was not sure that the steely, hard glint of those somber eyes might not succeed in inspiring fear in her own heart.

"The Arabs are afraid—so they obey," said Hafsi.

CHAPTER XV

FRANCES had a great deal to do during the next few days arranging the rooms of the apartment she had chosen to inhabit at Oued Zerqa. There was quite a small room with a beautiful view over the mountains which she decided should be her own little sitting-room, and she took down some of the portraits and pictures, which had been carelessly distributed over the house, to adorn its walls. The portraits were chiefly of dead and gone de Vernays; one, especially, was of a young and lovely girl who had perished on the guillotine. Frances remembered the picture well; it had always been a favorite of hers, and Aubrey had once told her that it resembled her. She, too, had been called Françoise.

She had unpacked some big cases of books which had been sent round by sea to Phillippeville, and a Kabyle carpenter had been busy making some shelves to receive these treasures. Anna was fashioning loose chintz covers for the chairs, and the little room had begun already to look cozy and homelike. There were quantities of flowers, placed in bowls of coarse Arab pottery—some late roses, bunches of silvery paper-narcissi, and masses of violets. Some big creamy water-coolers, shaped like a Greek vase,

such as the natives use for carrying water, were also filled with branches of palm and olive. As the days went on Frances wished that Jean would come again, so that she might show him the result of her labors.

She was glad that David had settled down without difficulty in his new surroundings. He spent many hours in the forest every day, and she had only begged him not to go too far, nor to get lost. There was a pony in the stables and a rough little cart, and David made use of them every morning to drive over to Mass in the little church at Azeba. It was a distance of some four miles. At present the boy did no work, but he had unpacked his books, and told her that he should begin the following week. For the present he could work alone, and she arranged a little study for him with a writing-table, book-case, and some chairs.

Jean did not appear again till about a week later. He was riding, and brought with him a second horse for David to try. He said he had had some difficulty in finding a suitable one, and this had occasioned the delay. David was delighted, and the two set off for a long ride together. They did not return for some hours. When they came in tea was ready, and they both entered the little sitting-room, where Frances was waiting for them.

Jean was silent and uncommunicative.

"Do you like my room?" Frances asked him.

Evidently it was not etiquette for her "servant" to submit an opinion unasked.

"It is very pretty, madame," he said.

"You see, I have put most of the portraits here. You know them, of course?"

"Yes. So you have put poor Françoise's here too," he said, hesitating a little as he pronounced the name.

The pictured eyes seemed to be watching them with a haunting wistfulness.

"She was a brave child," said Jean; "she died bravely."

"Perhaps," said Frances quickly, "she had learned to say *Mektoub!*" Her laugh was almost sad.

Jean looked at her. "Madame," he said in a low voice, and speaking in rapid French, "it seems to me you are low-spirited."

Frances did not answer. Her eyes were full of tears, that trembled bright as diamonds on her long lashes. Oh, she must not teach him to pity her—that would be unbearable! She had no need of pity. Like the other Françoise, she felt that she, too, could have died bravely. Death was often much easier than life. And had she not also felt the guillotine descend, demolishing with one sharp stroke love and happiness? She could have envied that other girl—so young, so beautiful, so brave.

Jean turned away and looked round the little room. Its air of homelike comfort impressed him. It was evident that Mrs. Amory intended for the present to settle here. She was no mere migratory bird of passage, but a fixed inhabitant. What had driven her to this?

When she spoke again she said: "I shall

want some new rugs; these tiled floors will be cold in winter. Where can I buy them?"

"You will find them in Constantine or Biskra," he said; "or in Tunis, if you do not mind going so far. I should suggest, perhaps, Constantine; and then, if you are not satisfied, you could go on to Biskra. The desert would interest you, if you have never seen it, and David would enjoy some rides there."

"That would be delightful," said Frances. "We might go to Constantine next week, might we not, David?"

David, who still followed French imperfectly, assented to this last suggestion, spoken in English.

"And the desert—you would like to see that?"

The boy's face brightened. "Oh, yes——" he said eagerly.

"Or, if you preferred it——" Jean hesitated.

"If I preferred it——?"

"I could accompany you, madame. There is much of interest to see in Biskra. I would write to our cousin, Elise de Vernay, who lives there—she is the widow of one of our cousins. She would be charmed to receive you and your son."

"Another cousin?" said Frances, smiling.

"There are a great many of us," he conceded. "But does the plan please you?"

"I should like it very much, if you are sure Madame de Vernay will not mind our descending upon her?"

"On the contrary, madame, she will be delighted; she is most anxious to make your acquaintance. She knew your father very well."

"When can we go?" said Frances, who in her old life had always been rather precipitate about carrying out any project that pleased her.

"I could not go before the end of next week," said Jean; "I have some work to finish here."

"You could leave it till you come back, couldn't you?" said Frances.

"No, madame." The answer was polite, but decisive.

"Work—for me—for the Blue River?" She put the question almost timidly.

"Yes, and I cannot leave it now," he replied. "It is out by the quarries. I was over there all yesterday, and all the day before, or I should have come here sooner to take your son for a ride. I have to start early. The men begin to work early."

"Why do you work so hard?" said Frances. "You will wear yourself out."

"It is my business to look after the estate."

"But it is my property—and I don't choose that you should kill yourself with fatigue. I am not—a slave-driver!" cried Frances warmly.

Jean looked at her in some surprise, almost, she thought, with displeasure and disapproval, as if she were interfering with matters she did not understand.

"Madame has no fault to find with the management of the property?" he asked, after a moment's pause. "It is true that last year we did not have a good return from the vines. It was the same everywhere in Algeria—the hail-storms were very destructive. But we made up the deficiency by the sale of the cork, which fetched

a far higher price than it has done for many previous years!"

"I do not know anything about these things. Please don't think I am finding any fault. I have been looking through those books you gave me, and I see that since you took over the management the income from the estate has increased enormously. But I don't want you to sacrifice everything—your time, your health, even your leisure, in the interests of Oued Zerqa!"

"I make no sacrifice," said Jean coldly. "If the income has increased, it is only because the conditions have perhaps been more favorable, and the olives have come into bearing, and we have had fewer locusts to devour the crops."

"I ought to tell you," she said, flushing a little, "that I have nothing now except my income from Oued Zerqa. And I have a debt that I should like to pay. But we can live here—David and I—on very little, so please do not look upon me as a—a tyrant! And if I ask you to take a little holiday now—to help me with my shopping—could you not see your way to doing it?"

"At the end of next week, madame—say Friday or Saturday—I can take a little holiday without detriment to Oued Zerqa, and I shall have pleasure in conducting you to Biskra. And in the meantime I will write to Madame de Vernay."

Frances felt inconsequently that she had been beating her hands against an impregnable stone wall. The man's will was of iron. He was her paid servant, and from this position he would not

budge. If she had commanded him to accompany her sooner he would, no doubt, have obeyed her. Otherwise he was not going to permit her to interfere with his work, nor beguile him from the path of strict duty and obligation.

Certainly he was not an easy person to entertain. This was the first meal they had had together, and Frances felt that in all her long experience she had never had such a difficult guest. Or was she losing the habit of chattering to people? Jean's cold, frozen manner, so determined, yet with its exasperating suggestion of deliberate subservience, repressed her. She could only take her cue from him, and remain for the most part silent.

As he rose to go he said suddenly:

"By the way, madame—I was almost forgetting one of the objects of my visit to-day—to bring you a Kabyle dog, called Beni. Hafsi tells me that you prefer not to have your house-door shut at night. Perhaps," and his dark eyes regarded her fixedly, "this is one of your English customs, but in this country it is, I think, not altogether wise or safe. It is true that Hafsi sleeps near the door, but the Arabs are very heavy sleepers at times. It will be wiser for you to have a guardian."

Frances flushed a little. She could not tell him the reason of her refusal to have the door bolted or even closed. She had an idea that he might think it foolish, a little morbid. She was sure that his own mind was calm, practical, sane; that he would regard sentiment of any kind at once exaggerated and unwholesome. Or, per-

haps he only looked upon her whim as another and significant instance of the peculiar madness of a mad nation!

"Where is the dog?" she asked.

Jean gave a long, low whistle. A shrill yelp, followed by a fierce onslaught of scratching at the door, announced that Beni had heard the summons, and had been released from his temporary place of restraint. Jean rose, opened the door, and admitted a white, rough-coated dog with a fox-like head and short ears.

Bounding up to his master with every appearance of passionate adoration, he next hurled himself against Frances, who let him climb on her knee while she fondled him.

"Good!" said Jean, with evident satisfaction. "Already he realizes that he belongs to you, madame. Beni"—and he held up a thin, brown finger warningly—"you are to obey that lady in all things. You are to guard her from danger when Hafsi falls asleep at his post!"

Beni wagged his tail and gave a short, affirmative bark.

"Die for her!" commanded Jean.

Beni sprang down from Frances's lap, and with a groan flung himself on the floor, and remained there stark and inanimate.

But Frances stooped and patted the rough, white head. "Get up now, Beni," she said, "and I will give you a biscuit."

Beni sat up on his hind legs. This was evidently an occasion for displaying his whole repertoire of tricks and accomplishments. He waved a paw in an ingratiating manner toward

his new owner, while his brown eyes glanced wistfully at Frances, at Jean, and at the biscuit.

As he was demolishing it Frances turned to Jean.

"Oh, but you mustn't part with him. I am sure he is an old friend—you have taught him so much! The dog would feel it, too. It would be cruel to both of you!"

"He is yours," said Jean. "I hope you will like him. We have already made a—a mutual detachment. Beni comprehends the situation perfectly. His ancestors have long been accustomed to guard the douar—the gourbi, the tent, or any other habitation of the nomad. You will find him trustworthy, faithful, affectionate. In these qualities he could set an example to many human beings. I have told him that his home in future will be here with you. Please—please do not refuse this gift, madame!"

Frances could only thank him and stoop again to pat the rough head. She kissed Beni between the ears, and he, to return the salutation, licked her hand.

Jean smiled as he bade her farewell. To her surprise Beni crouched at her feet and made no effort to follow his quondam master, except with his eyes, which were wistfully and pathetically fixed upon that beloved departing form.

Frances was touched to think that Jean should be so concerned for her safety. "It is only because I am part of Oued Zerqa now," she thought, with a little rueful smile; "and it would reflect upon his management if anything were to happen to me and David!"

Beni henceforth became a devoted and attached member of the household, always accompanying David in his solitary rambles in the forest, and sleeping at night close to the open door.

CHAPTER XVI

ELISE DE VERNAY lived in a little, white, palm-shaded villa close to the edge of the oasis at Biskra. From her windows she could see the beautiful range of the Aurès Mountains culminating in the fine rose-colored summit of Djebel Ahmar-Khreddou, or, as the French call it, the "Red Cheek," stretching away against the sapphire-blue of the sky. The long silver line of the desert, lying like a gleaming pool, melted very far away into the mists of the horizon, and Elise could sometimes see a group of dark blots approaching across that pale expanse, resolving itself at last into a caravan of mules and camels, transporting goods and merchandise from the cities of the Sahara.

Here she lived a retired life, for she was no longer young. Her husband had been dead for some years, and it was to be near her sons, both of whom were serving in the African cavalry, that she had made her home at Biskra, only removing to Philippeville for July and August, when she found the heat unbearable.

Comtesse Elise de Vernay was now nearly seventy years old; her hair was as blanché as the snows that crowned the rosy peaks of the Aurès in winter, but her complexion still retained something of the freshness of youth, while

her eyes of brilliant blue were wholly undimmed by the passing of years. She looked like some great lady of the eighteenth century, and her dress, always of soft black satin with a white fichu draped about the shoulders, and a mantilla of precious lace surmounting her snowy coiffure, owed nothing to modern fashion. She habitually wore some fine pearls and diamonds. Slight and small in figure, she was very erect and moved with graceful leisurely dignity. She was devoted to Jean, and told him that she always regarded him as another son. Sometimes, on her way back to Philippeville, she would turn aside and spend a few days with him at Aïn-Safra. She loved the restfulness and peace of the forest, especially in the last days of summer, when the great heat was at an end.

She had heard of Mrs. Amory's arrival at Oued Zerqa with genuine concern. One of her sons had indeed given her a garbled account of Aubrey's story, derived from the newspapers, and it had filled her with surprise and horror. That a young woman, practically deserted by a defaulting husband who could never show his face again in civilized ways, should come to live alone at Oued Zerqa, with only a little boy and a maid, was surely committing a grave breach of the conventions. It was a defiance, and she ought to have known better and remained in England, where she would have had greater facilities for educating her son. Madame de Vernay, having meditated with some displeasure upon this aspect of the case, began to comfort herself with the reflection that Jean disliked

women, and never sought their company if he could possibly avoid it. He had never shown any eagerness to marry, even when he had been in a position to do so, while living in princely state in his old château near Avignon. It was little likely that Jean would see much of this—this person. His letter requesting her to receive Frances and her son had perturbed the old lady not a little. Still, she had a very great curiosity to see her, for after all, on her mother's side, she was a de Vernay. And the first sight of Frances, a slim, gray-clad figure with soft masses of dark hair and the beautiful de Vernay eyes, was not a reassuring one. The girl—for indeed she seemed little more, in spite of the tall boy by her side—was lovely; it needed no second glance to assure Elise of that fact; her voice, too, was low and thrilling; she moved with a quick, light grace. To Elise she spelled danger. It was an unheard-of position. Where was her husband? What had he done? People talked of escape, of flight. But in any case he had left his wife. Was it some fault of hers? She was lovely enough to keep any man at her feet. But with the English—so proverbially careless of their womenkind—one could never tell!

During dinner she talked of Oued Zerqa, and asked Frances if the place was doing well.

"You see, I have only been there a fortnight," she said; "so I hardly know anything about it. M. de Vernay can tell you."

Thus appealed to, Jean gave his opinion.

"I tell him he is wearing himself out over Oued Zerqa," said Frances.

"Jean has a conscience, as we all know," said Comtesse de Vernay. "And the book—how does that get on?"

"I have not had much opportunity lately for thinking about the book," he said rather coldly.

"He has been getting the place ready for us," said Frances, remembering Hafsi's words.

"It was so dirty—the walls had to be washed," said Jean; "and the roof wanted repairing. And you know, my dear aunt, what the Arabs are unless one looks after them all the time!"

"You see, it is my fault—I have eaten up his leisure," said Frances, smiling; "but I did not know about the book."

"Oh, the book is nothing," said Jean, coloring under his tanned skin; "it is not worth thinking about!"

"But I am sorry to have interrupted your studies," she said quickly.

"Jean knows more about Roman Africa than any one living, I believe," said Elise, with evident partiality; "and one day the book is to make him famous, is it not so, Jean?"

Jean began to talk of some recent discoveries made by the White Fathers in the neighborhood of Carthage. Frances thought he desired to turn the subject of conversation from his own book, which he did not wish to discuss in front of her. She was to know nothing of the studious, intimate side of his life. To her he was to be only the agent, the faithful steward.

"And how is my dear friend Beni?" inquired the old lady presently.

Jean's face was impassive.

"He is well, I believe, but he is not with me any more. I have sent him away!"

Madame de Vernay looked at him in speechless astonishment.

"Sent Beni away!" she echoed, when she had recovered a little from her surprise. "What has he done, the poor beast? Was he growing ferocious?"

"No—he was not ferocious. But Madame Amory needed a guardian, for her house is very solitary, and I have given Beni to her. He is very happy—do not pity him!"

"I do not pity him," said Elise; "I pity you, Jean—you must be lost without your faithful friend and companion."

"I am only too pleased that Madame Amory should possess Beni," he said quietly.

"I didn't want to take him," said Frances, with some confusion. She felt instinctively that Madame de Vernay was condemning her for her selfishness.

"But Beni immediately died for her!" said Jean, laughing. "And after a prolonged death he sat up and begged for a biscuit—of course Madame Amory could not possibly resist such proofs of affection!"

"Do you mean to make a long stay at Oued Zerqa?" said Madame de Vernay.

"I mean to live there," said Frances simply; "it is the only home I have now."

"You will find it very dull—without any neighbors," said Elise.

"I have a great many books. And there is David. I do not think I shall be dull."

"Perhaps you will have friends staying with you later on?"

"Oh, no—I could not expect people to come so far. My friends are all in England."

"But you are so young to live alone. People will think it strange."

Frances was silent. Her fears were finding expression in the comments of this alarmingly frank old lady.

"I—I—can not help being young and alone," she said rather pitifully; "it is my misfortune."

She looked entreatingly toward Jean, but though he saw the mute appeal in her eyes he did not come to her assistance. Perhaps he agreed with his aunt—she should never have come to Oued Zerqa. Perhaps even he wished that she had not come, disturbing his solitude, his work, depriving him of the little leisure he possessed for study. Was there, then, no place in the wide world where a deserted and abandoned woman and her child could find peace and shelter? Why did he say nothing in defense of her action? It was true that he was not in possession of all the facts—he knew no details of Aubrey's downfall. And she could not bring herself to tell him about Aubrey—Frances perceived with quick instinct that Madame de Vernay's solicitude was entirely upon Jean's account.

"I expect you will soon get tired of the place and go back to London—to your own friends," said Madame de Vernay, and by her manner it was not difficult to gather that she considered this the only commendable course of action open to Frances. "You will also find it difficult to

educate your son in these wilds!" She looked sympathetically at David. "Is he not going to school?"

"Not at present," said Frances; "he has been for two years to school in England. But I wanted to have him with me."

She pleaded fatigue, and went early to bed. She began to be sorry that she had yielded to Jean's suggestion, and accompanied him to Biskra. Madame de Vernay had wished to see her, and now that she had seen her she evidently disapproved of her, and of her living at Oued Zerqa. She had shown that very plainly in her words and manner during dinner. Burning tears came into Frances's eyes. She went to her window and let the cool night-wind blow on her face. There was a moon, and it hung high in the sky above the desert, transforming the sands to a liquid sea of pale silver. The palm trees in the garden were stenciled against the sky in a soft darkness that made them look like the black feathers of gigantic birds; they rustled and creaked protestingly in the wind. From the streets beyond there came the sound of the wild, savage, melancholy music that is heard everywhere in North Africa; a man's voice was singing those monotonous, formless cadences. The rhythmic, almost mechanical fluting of a reed-pipe made a kind of background of sound, sweet and thrilling, the very music of Pan. The great peace of those wide, uninhabited wastes lying so close to her communicated itself insensibly to Frances. The desert has a certain healing power; it can even temporarily compel forget-

fulness; the touch of its pure air is an anodyne.

Downstairs Jean was smoking in the drawing-room, half lying on a divan covered with Oriental hangings.

Madame de Vernay sat near the table stitching a piece of fine and delicate embroidery.

Presently she looked up.

"You must persuade her to return to England," she said abruptly; "the position is an impossible one for you both. She is young and, like all Englishwomen, she looks younger than her years. And she is very beautiful. You will fall in love with her!"

"I never fall in love," said Jean, with a bitter smile; "you need not be afraid for me. I am her servant—I obey her orders. I look after her house and property. I insist upon her regarding me as a servant—I will not let her remember that I am her cousin."

"My dear Jean, it is not the slightest use for you to talk like this to me! Are you in love with her already that you should take so many precautions?"

"They are not precautions. Directly I saw her I felt sure that people would begin to talk when they came to hear of her living at Oued Zerqa, alone except for her little boy. I am her only near neighbor, and I was resolved for her sake to give no plausibility to idle gossip. We meet only on the most formal terms, and it is very easy to see that I bore her—that she dislikes me!"

"Indeed!" said Madame de Vernay, with inconceivable dryness.

"I am, I know, a dull companion," pursued Jean, "and I never seem able to please her!"

"You gave Beni to her. And she accepted the gift."

"I will confess to you, Aunt Elise, that it went to my heart to part with poor Beni. He was as nearly human as a dog can be, and I miss him inexpressibly. But it seems, so Hafsi tells me, that Madame Amory has a curious fancy—a caprice, if you will—for leaving her front door open—yes, open all night. Hafsi came and told me because he was alarmed—he did not like the responsibility of guarding the house under these conditions. It is known that she has pretty and valuable *bibelots* and jewels. That is why I insisted upon her having Beni. She didn't want to take him, but the dog displayed an immediate affection for her, and he has shown no disposition to return to me. It was as if he understood perfectly that I was calling upon him to perform a service—which I could not undertake myself."

"My dear boy—you make me more and more unhappy. The woman is probably very neurotic and morbid—most Englishwomen are—it is the result of the restless lives they lead!"

"I do not find her either neurotic or morbid," said Jean coldly.

"To sleep with the front door open—in the very heart of the African forests?"

"It is—some childish fancy of hers," he said.

"It is at least a very insane fancy—and she is not a child. And how many times, may I ask,

Jean, have you walked round her house during the night to ascertain that she is safe?"

A dull crimson darkened his immovable face.

"Not once," he answered, "since Beni has been there!"

"And before?" she pursued relentlessly.

"Please," he said, smiling, "please do not ask me so many questions. But I did go once or twice before I gave Beni to her. The door was open; a light burned within. Hafsi was sleeping the sleep of the just. I could have taken anything without disturbing a soul. I kicked Hafsi; he deserved it." Jean set his teeth. "He awoke and began to howl."

"What a tiresome, inconsiderate person she must be!"

"Perhaps, if I had explained to her that it was unsafe, she would have given up the idea."

"No doubt it gives her pleasure to see you prostrate at her feet!"

"I am her paid servant, and it is my duty to protect her property, and the house is part of her property—I intend to guard it. I can not send her away," he smiled ruefully; "and you can see for yourself that she has made up her mind to live there. Please do not permit yourself to dislike her. She is brave and, I think, good. She must have been shamefully treated, and in coming to Oued Zerqa she doubtless hoped to find the peace and solitude which one can not find in the world."

"She should have stayed with her own relations, and then no one could have gossiped about her—or about you!"

Jean smiled. "But there is no one to gossip at Oued Zerqa."

"Hafsi—this maid of hers—the whole of Azeba. Then we shall hear it here—and in Bône and Constantine—wherever people meet and talk."

Jean saw that she was in a perverse mood. Something of her own uneasiness communicated itself to him. "I hope not," he said.

"You think I am a fussy old woman. But I know the world. I did not live fifty years in Paris for nothing. And I know that a beautiful young woman can not go and live alone, with only a maid and a little boy, without getting herself talked about, especially when her only near neighbor is a man—not old or ill-favored——"

He bowed in acknowledgment of this compliment. "My dear aunt, you flatter me!"

"She is young and beautiful and fascinating. She knows how to put on her clothes. She speaks in that low, charming way——"

"I admit all these things. But I am not fascinated."

But Madame de Vernay folded up her embroidery and retired to her room, wholly unconvinced by this asseveration.

CHAPTER XVII

“**W**E are going into the town to buy rugs and carpets,” said Jean on the following morning; “I think we had better lunch at the hotel.”

Elise de Vernay had apparently recovered her temper. Her guest, after a rather sleepless night, had appeared looking very white and sad. She had aroused the compassion of the elder woman.

“You will both be cheated,” she prophesied.

“I am afraid so,” said Jean, with resignation.

The villa was situated at a little distance from the actual town of Biskra, and fearing that Frances might be tired he had ordered a *calèche* to take them thither. Two strong-looking ponies with jingling bells were harnessed to this somewhat ramshackle conveyance. A native driver, almost as black as a negro, sat on the box flourishing a long whip.

The morning was brilliant; the sun was shining with great power, and the desert sparkled as if encrusted with all the precious gems of Aladdin’s cave. The Aurès Mountains flamed rose-red against that sky of translucent sapphire.

Frances was enchanted with the little town. It was not yet the tourist season, and they met few Europeans as they walked from shop to shop, examining all the curious wares instantly

produced for their inspection. The small dark bazaars, each presided over by a dusky Jew or Moslem proprietor, who seemed to desire to display his wares as well as to sell them, delighted Frances. Jean noticed that she came in for no small share of attention, and Madame de Vernay's warnings of the preceding night struck him with fresh misgiving. Yes, she was certainly very lovely, with her dazzling fair skin, her dark, brilliant eyes, her grace of bearing; she compelled attention, and here, in this little desert town, women of her type were rare.

With the help of Jean she bought several carpets made by the craftsmen of El Oued, the chief town of the Souf. Their soft colorings and indefinite patterns, their texture rich and Oriental, made them things of singular beauty. And in one of the shops Jean discovered a lovely Persian carpet, old and worn but still magnificent. The price named was rather high, and Frances hesitated. Stephen's check, which he had given her to buy things for her house, was large, but it admitted of no extravagant purchases, and she needed a good many things still to make the place comfortable. The man, seeing her hesitation, said quickly: "I am sure that monsieur, thy husband, will give it to thee as a present, madame!"

And he bestowed a half-cunning smile upon Jean.

Frances laughed and colored a little. Nevertheless, she turned to Jean for advice.

"Would it be very extravagant?" she asked.

"I do not think so. The carpet is worth the

money; it is a genuine one," he said in a low tone.

"I should like to have it in my sitting-room," she said.

The carpet was bought, and Frances found it hard to resist the beautiful specimens of old brass and silverware, the lamps and trays and jugs delicately wrought; the fine embroideries from Persia and Stamboul; the little Tunisian tables inlaid with mother-o'-pearl, which were eagerly displayed for her inspection by the native vendors.

"You must not let me commit any more extravagances," she told Jean. He was glad to see her looking so happy and so gay. All the traces of the previous night's weeping had gone from her face. She had forgotten the wound caused by Madame de Vernay's words. For, after all, had she not a right to be here in these free and joyous places of the sun? Had not Aubrey wished it? The intoxicating desert air seemed to give her new life. She was already gaining health and strength. Cold Mead and London seemed very far away. Out here she would learn to wait patiently for Aubrey's return.

"But you must come and see the market," he said; "and there are lots of pretty and cheap Arab things that you will want to buy. We can pay for them out of the profits of Oued Zerqa," he added, smiling.

Under the white arcades of the market-place a new scene was disclosed to Frances's bewildered eyes. Here was a babel of voices, mingling with the persistent and wistful music of innumerable

gezbahs played with such easy skill, and with the incessant barking of dogs, and the low snarl of the waiting camels. She saw the Arabs sitting there playing games of draughts and ronda, sipping their black coffee and smoking the dark Algerian cigarettes. They all turned and looked at Jean and Frances as they passed. The tall Englishwoman in her white dress, with the fair skin of the North, and the dark hair and Southern eyes, attracted attention on all sides. Boys ran out and besought her to buy a strange medley of things. Dried locusts, baskets of henna leaves, the little mirrors worn by Arab women framed in bright red leather with a loop for attaching it to the dress, necklaces of beads and cowries, little silver charms called the Hand of Fatma for averting the evil eye, long scarves of chiffon delicately embroidered with sequins, trays of sweetmeats and cakes were offered to Frances by the small, dark-eyed vendors. She bought one of the wooden flutes with its dainty arabesques, of which the pattern was stained red with henna. The boy who sold it to her put it to his lips and played a melody so wild that it seemed to her almost unearthly. She was beset, too, by sand-diviners and fortune-tellers. A gypsy woman seized her hand and cried in French: "Madame, let me tell your fortune. Ah, I can tell your fortune! You have a happy face, but in your heart you are not happy—something is making you sad. I can tell you the reason, and I will tell you when you will become happy once more."

"Oh, no," said Frances, "I don't want to have

my fortune told!" She drew away her hand sharply. But the woman was persistent.

"I can read it in your eyes, madame. The sand-diviner, he will tell you the same thing. You have come across the sea—a long journey, and the one you love is also across the sea. You will not see him—not yet—many things lie between you. Perhaps, even, you will never see him again. But you will find some one else who will love you much better. Only you will be blind to his loving eyes that regard only you, and deaf to the sound of his voice that would only speak your name, and you will deny him the kisses of your mouth! And there are many things—the sea—the wild sea with great beating waves that will wash over the face of your beloved and keep him from coming to you. But the door of your house is ready and open to receive him—you live only for the sound of his voice and the touch of his hand, and the kiss of his mouth, and the beating of his heart. Madame——"

"Go away!" said Jean sharply; "you are annoying the lady. She does not wish to have her fortune told."

"And yours, monsieur? Ah, let me tell yours!"

"No, no," said Jean, laughing; "my fortune is finished long ago. Come," and he put out his hand as if he would lead Frances away.

She followed him trembling. "Do you believe in these people?" she asked him eagerly.

"The woman is an Egyptian—probably she has gifts of a kind. Only I could see she was

annoying you. I hope I did well to send her away?"

"I didn't want to hear her—she said too much as it was. But it fascinated me," said Frances. "Now I want to go and buy one of those pretty Arab scarves." They walked across the dusty, sunlit square, past the group of Arabs and the snarling camels into the market-place beyond.

"What a babel!" said Jean. "Perhaps you have had enough of it? When you have chosen a scarf we will go on to the hotel and have our lunch—it must be getting late."

A blind beggar attired in filthy rags was led up to them by a little Arab girl whose blue dress and scarlet head-dress made a patch of vivid color. "Please give a *sou*!" she entreated.

Jean took some *sous* from his pocket and gave them to her.

"The Arabs are very good to the blind," he said; "they seldom want for anything. And they say that charity shuts the seventy doors of evil and gives passage over Sirath, the bridge sharp as a sword which stretches between hell and paradise. The Prophet must have taken the idea from our Catholic practice of giving alms for the relief of the souls in purgatory. And the Arabs—at least the wealthier ones—are bound to bestow hospitality. The poor and needy have only to come and say '*Diaf Allah*'—'We are the guests sent by God'—and food and lodging are never denied to them. It is a very old formula, I believe. And the answer is always given with equal formality, a grave bow, the right hand laid on the heart, and the words

'*Bismillâh! maraba bihoum,*'—'In the name of God, be welcome.' "

They had walked back toward the hotel with its palm-shaded garden, and Jean was about to go in and order lunch when the slight form of an Arab approached them. He was sauntering slowly along with an arrogant, rather swaggering air. The heavy folds of a pale blue burnous soft as silk hung over his shoulders, falling apart in front and disclosing a zouave jacket of the same color, loose white trousers and high riding-boots. He looked about eighteen years old, and for an Arab was fair, with gray eyes under lashes of silken darkness. The poise of the small head under its heavy white turban was superb. A pink flower stuck under his right ear exaggerated the rather effeminate impression he produced upon Frances. But even among the groups of slow-moving, dignified Arabs this figure was conspicuous for its suggestion of agile grace.

A sudden change came over Jean; he halted, stared at the boy; then, giving an involuntary exclamation of surprise, he went quickly up to him and held out his hand.

"*Alix!*" he said.

"Why, it is Jean after all," said the Arab, speaking in perfect French. "I was sure I saw you in the market this morning, but I was playing a game of *ronda*." The voice, Frances thought, was deep for a woman, but scarcely deep enough for a youth. "And what are you doing here in Biskra, Jean? Why have you deserted your vines and cork trees?"

Frances felt more than ever puzzled. For surely this was a woman speaking, surely those were a woman's eyes surveying Jean so calmly.

"And may I ask you why you have deserted your nomad's tent, Alix?" said Jean.

"Fate and rheumatism," answered the Arab. "I have been doing a course of the waters here. The doctor threatened to send me to the Baths of the Accursed at Hammam-Meskoutine. But I protested, and promised to be very obedient and prudent if only he would permit me to try the cure here, where I am at least in sight of the desert and the eternal sands!"

"You must allow me to present you to my cousin, Mrs. Amory. Madame, this is the Comtesse Alix Rezanoff, at present of no fixed address, is it not so?" and he regarded her with a grave whimsicality.

Frances took the proffered hand—a slim, delicately shaped one, but hard and firm to the touch.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, madame," she said in a soft, low voice. "I am sure you took me for an Arab just now, did you not? It is perhaps you who have persuaded Jean to leave his horrible forests full of fierce wild beasts?"

"The forests," interposed Jean, "belong to Madame Amory. You must not abuse them!"

Alix flashed a brilliant smile upon him. "You must explain me to Madame Amory next time you are alone with her, and as kindly as you can, please, Jean. Now let us go and have some breakfast, for I am exceedingly hungry."

They walked across the square garden, and Jean flung the end of his cigarette to some gazelles that lived there in captivity; one of them demolished the coveted luxury with greedy satisfaction.

"Poor little things!" said Alix, putting her slim hand through the bars of the cage. "How I should like to take you back to the desert with me! You must hate being here, don't you?" She stroked and patted them tenderly. "I should hate it, and you were born wild and I was not. Life taught me to be a savage. . . ." She turned and walked after Frances into the hotel with the slow, dignified steps of an Arab.

"Come!" she said imperiously to Jean. "I have had nothing to eat to-day—only a cup of black coffee and some cigarettes. And I went for a long ride this morning."

They took their seats at a little table near the window. It was not twelve o'clock, and there were few people present, but one or two officers wearing the pale blue tunic of the Chasseurs d'Afrique nodded carelessly to Alix Rezanoff from an opposite table.

Frances could now observe Alix more closely. Like many Russians, she had a very small and narrow face. Her complexion was sallow and pale, but clear. Her features were small, and the eyes were of a deep, sparkling gray under narrow, straight black brows very finely penciled and quick to meet in a frown. But the eyes fascinated Frances. They were strangely alive, full of queer lights and shadows, of steely,

almost frosty glints, and yet at times somber and dark with melancholy; they were sophisticated, experienced eyes, disillusioned but eager; they rested now inquiringly upon Frances.

Who could she be? What was she doing here in Biskra with Jean de Vernay, who never spoke to a woman if he could avoid it? "I wonder who she can be? The English cousin who owns the forests, I suppose," she thought. But the English cousin was married—and where was her husband?

"You are not staying here?" she asked, propping her little chin on her hands.

"No—we are both staying for a few days with Elise," said Jean.

Alix made a little expressive grimace, pursing her lips and narrowing her eyes.

"How brave of you!" she said. "And how many sermons has she preached? It is strange, is it not, Mrs. Amory?—but Elise does not approve of me!"

"Nobody approves of you, Alix," Jean reminded her.

Alix ate for a few minutes ravenously, as if she had been half starved. She drank a little red wine which Jean poured into her glass.

When she looked up she said: "And how is Oued Zerqa? Oh, I could not live one day in those great gloomy forests of yours, Mrs. Amory! I must have the desert—miles of sands all round me—the sun and the great wide spaces like the sea, and only the little thin, sharp shadows of the rocks and the gray scrub!"

"Mrs. Amory is living at Oued Zerqa," said

Jean; "she is learning to like the forest. And as for me—you know my work lies there."

"Work!" interrupted Alix, with an impatient gesture of her small hand with its tapered, henna-stained fingers. "Why do you work? To have a roof over your head and bread to eat? One has enough with a few *sous* a day to buy bread and dates and a little wine. For a roof, what can be better than the sky and the stars, or, if it is wet, the thick camel's-hair cloth of one's tent? For a bed the soft, soft sands of the desert that rest one far better than anything else in the world. What can one want more in the world which God has given to us? Freedom and food and the soft, warm sands to sleep on? I am in prison here, like those poor little gazelles!"

"So you are as wild as ever?" said Jean, with a smile, half amused, half pitying.

"I don't often descend into civilized places," she said; "I am out of touch with it all. Last week I went a pilgrimage to a marabout in an oasis not far from here. It was the day when the Arab women go there to pray that they may have children, and I went to watch them. Some were very young—quite children, according to our ideas; others were getting old. Many of them had come quite a long way. I talked to them—they told me about their lives. They kissed the horrible, dirty rags that other pilgrims had hung about the koubba for votive offerings. They sang and prayed and wept. It was the tomb of a woman saint—Lella somebody; she is almost as famous as the one near Tunis. The Arab women interest me, but they think I am

mad to go about dressed like a man; they say I should wear a veil!"

"I am inclined to agree with them," said Jean de Vernay.

Alix laughed. "They wonder that I dare roam about the desert alone in the way I do. They forget that once I was a Spahi, and fought when our little garrison was attacked one night by Touaregs. Oh, these hands were not useless, I assure you!"

Frances gave an involuntary shiver of horror. She looked at the little hands with the henna-stained fingertips—the hands that had not been useless.

"They had better have been employed tending a child, Alix," said Jean coldly.

She answered almost unconcernedly:

"I have done my share of that, as you know, Jean. It was partly to see my baby's grave that I came to Biskra."

She held her head proudly. Frances felt a wish to escape from the scene; it seemed to her to be surcharged with strange, disturbing emotions.

The meal was over, and Alix asked for coffee. "Only it must be Arab coffee—I can't drink anything else now," she said, lighting a cigarette and puffing little thin wreaths of smoke into the air. "And now, Jean, tell me—where is Paul?"

"He is in Tunis," said Jean coldly.

"In Tunis?" she echoed. "What is he doing there? When did he leave Paris? He never told me!"

"Your address is rather uncertain, is it not?" said Jean.

"What is he doing in Africa?"

"He had some business in Bizerta and Tunis. He returns to France next week."

"You must send him a telegram this afternoon and say that I am here!" said Alix imperiously.

Jean's face hardened; he made no reply.

Alix stamped her foot. "Why are you silent? Why don't you answer?"

"I shall not tell him that you are here," said Jean in a harsh tone; "you had far better leave him in peace."

"But he wants to see me. He always wants to see me. And if I choose that he should have this happiness?" Her voice rang sharply, and her face and eyes flamed with anger. She was always a woman of unrestrained temper; the least word of contradiction sufficed to arouse it.

Frances watched them in amazement, feeling that she had no right to listen to such an intimate conversation; but they both seemed to have forgotten her presence utterly.

"If you thought of his happiness at all," said Jean, "you would leave him to his career, his work, his life too long spoiled by your caprice."

The anger in his face matched hers. He spoke in the sharp tone one uses in rebuking an unruly child.

"You preach like a curé—like Elise de Vernay," said Alix. "And Paul does care for me still—you know it; he works only to forget, and he can not forget! Do you think he has come to Africa now without the thought of me uppermost in his mind? Do you not think he

has said to himself, over and over again, 'Perhaps I shall see Alix again?'

"Oh, I don't doubt it—the poor miserable one!" said Jean.

She turned to Frances. "Since when has our cold, calm Jean taken to scolding?"

Her face was full of mockery; there was less wickedness in it than sheer childish malice; she was a tease, and Jean, remembering this, relented a little.

"Why don't you send for him yourself, Alix?" he said, "if it would give you so much pleasure to see him crawling back on his knees."

"Or flying in his new Blériot," said Alix; "that is what he finds his chief delight in now. I wish he would not come crawling on his knees," she continued disdainfully; "I should respect him far more if he showed some spirit!" She pushed back her turban ever so slightly and displayed a long, jagged, cruel-looking scar that disfigured her brow. "Do you see this mark, Mrs. Amory? Only my thick turban saved me from death when an Arab struck me here with a sword. Do you think I respected him less because he wished to kill me? He wished to destroy me because he knew I had power; he was afraid of me, and he did not like my being friends with his wife; he said I was teaching her to rebel. He beat her, poor fool—I heard her scream and beg for mercy, and I went to her assistance. It was then he tried to kill me. He nearly succeeded—I was at death's door for many weeks." She arranged her turban, pulling it down over the scar. There was a gleam of triumph in her gray eyes. "One

of the Caïds of the Souf vowed to avenge the blow; he and his tribe made him their blood enemy, and one night when he was riding across the desert to his home they caught him! I did not hear about it until long afterward, but he was found stabbed to death."

Jean looked at Frances in dismay; she had turned a little pale at the recital.

"You will alarm Mrs. Amory," he said. He added by way of explanation: "The Arabs always revenge the murder of one of their own kindred in this way, but one does not often hear of cases where they avenge an attack upon a Roumi."

"I knew the Caïd well," said Alix, "and had once rendered a trifling service to his favorite child. That is why they made Ben-Salah their blood enemy—because I had no tribe!"

He said despairingly: "Oh, Alix, why are you so wild? Can nothing tame you?"

"I think I was born wild," she said, "and the desert has taught me how to live and be free—free as the winds that blow through the palm trees and across the sands. You and Paul can never know the joy of it—this freedom from all shackles, from all chains! Paul wears chains because he is in love with me; they are fastened to my hands. A little tug and he comes running to my feet! I push him, and away he goes dragging his chains. Is that not a fool's part to play, when with a little will, a little resolve, he could be free as air? The Buddhists are wiser when they say, *Let no man love anything; loss of the beloved is evil; he who loves wears chains.*"

Frances listened with a curious sense of being under a spell, so great was this strange woman's power of fascination. The atmosphere she created around her was an unnatural one. She was a wild, afreet-like creature, yet her words seemed to control that hour in the little hotel at Biskra. It was impossible to listen to her and remain unmoved, indifferent. And who was this Paul whom she so despised, and yet desired to see?

"I think I would rather love and wear chains than be free," said Frances sadly.

"Most women would agree with you," said Alix, "but I have tried both, and I did not like my servitude, and I would not go back to the chains." She rose from the table as if suddenly weary of the conversation. Frances crossed herself, and noticing the action, Alix said: "Ah, you wear those chains, too, like our poor Jean here!"

They followed her out of the dining-room into the sunshine of the garden. Frances was struck afresh by the superb poise of the little turbaned head, the arrogant, indolent, majestic movements, like those of an Arab of high rank.

"Some day," she said, as they parted and she took Frances Amory's hand, "I hope you will let me come and see you at Oued Zerqa. It is a long time since I was there. I promise not to abuse the Tell."

"I shall be so glad if you will come," said Frances quietly. She took the proffered hand—the hand that once had caressed and soothed her dying baby, had ministered to the Caïd's favorite child, the hand that had not been useless when the Touaregs attacked the little fort.

CHAPTER XVIII

“**A**LIX is in Biskra,” said Jean to Madame de Vernay when they were seated at dinner that night in her little villa. “We met her to-day and she breakfasted with us.”

“Alix!” she echoed in a tone of mingled surprise and displeasure. “Well—how is she? What is she doing?”

“She has been doing a cure for rheumatism, as far as I could gather. I don’t think she means to stay here long. I am going to see her this evening, so I shall hear more of her plans.”

“Paul is not here?” inquired Elise de Vernay.

“No, but he is in Tunis, unfortunately, and she is going to send for him. I hope he won’t come—I hope he is beginning to get over his infatuation,” said Jean.

Frances asked timidly: “Who is Paul?”

“Paul de Vernay is my only brother. He is about five years younger than I am,” said Jean. “Alix has refused to marry him; she will not leave her nomadic life.”

“She is a woman bent upon defying both God and man,” said Madame de Vernay. “She has given up her religion, and with it everything that should have been precious to her, her good name, her friends, her proper place in the world. Oh,

I admit everything! Her husband was a brute, and made her miserable, but he is dead now. Report says he had some hand in her child's death; he didn't mean to hurt it, but he was drunk or jealous, or both. She never forgave him—she won't even be called by his name."

"I am sure she must have astonished you very much, madame?" said Jean to Frances.

"I thought she was an Arab at first. She is not French, surely?"

"No, she is a Russian, well born and well bred," said Elise; "she lived many years in Petersburg and Paris; she was as a girl, extremely charming. Then she married, and at first everything seemed to prosper. But they lost money and came out here to economize. Then all the tragedies happened—the child's death first. He was a lovely little boy, and Alix adored him. The husband was killed in a brawl one night in Constantine—somewhere down in the Arab quarter. The circumstances were not at all to his credit. And you have seen Alix—the sole survivor of these tragic happenings. I think I could forgive her everything except her treatment of Paul."

The old lady's blue eyes kindled.

"Madame Amory will perhaps undertake to tame her," said Jean; "she invited herself to Oued Zerqa."

"It would be a work of charity," said Madame de Vernay, "but I am afraid she is past reclamation. She is young—not yet thirty—but she has gone through too much."

"She has the heart of a child through it all," said Jean, "and I believe that after all it is a good little heart," he added.

After dinner he made his excuses to his cousin and went out to see Alix. Frances felt a little alarmed at being left alone with Madame de Vernay, who, however, was too much occupied to-night with thoughts of Alix to have any left for herself.

"That is a good boy," she said, as Jean went out, leaving them together in the drawing-room. She took out her work and bent over the delicate embroidery. "I wish he could do something with poor Alix. Perhaps I was wrong to blame her so much, for she has surely suffered a great deal. But she is perverse, and now she is offended with me—she never comes to see me when she is in Biskra. Jean and Paul are almost as dear to me as my own sons, and I am sorry they have neither of them married. Paul has money, but of course poor Jean has lost his. He bore all his losses without complaint. He is very proud, and refused to accept any help, preferring to work for his bread. And he has worked very hard."

"Too hard," said Frances. "I have asked him to spare himself; it is of no use. He is out early and late."

"Fortunately, he likes the forest life, and Oued Zerqa suits him."

"Oh, you think he is happy there? That he does not regret his home at Avignon?"

"He has no idle regrets," said Madame de

Vernay; "there was a question of his marriage just before the crash came. A young girl of good family and rich. Her parents, however, were prudent, and withdrew. Nothing had been settled, and the girl made a very suitable marriage about a year later."

"Did it hurt him?" asked Frances, her interest awakened.

"He has never spoken of it," said Elise.

So he, too, had had his earthquakes, demolishing happiness and security; he, too, had been driven forth into the wilderness.

"And you," said Madame de Vernay, "you intend to live at Oued Zerqa until——"

Frances Amory's eyes filled with tears.

"Until Aubrey—that is, my husband—can come back to me——" She waited a moment, and a sudden remembrance of the gypsy woman's words flashed across her mind.

"For he *must* come back, Madame de Vernay. We were so happy—I am sure he will find a way——"

Elise de Vernay rose and put her arms around Frances's neck and kissed her. "Be patient, my dear child. Pray for his return. Your boy—your little boy—is a saint, madame—be thankful for that."

And to herself she thought, "That is why Beni guards the door, which must never be shut!"

"I am not going to sit indoors," declared Alix, when she and Jean had had some coffee together

in the veranda of the hotel; "we will go down to the Villa Landon and look at the moonlight on the desert."

They walked down the street, past the bazaars with their winking, jeweled lights, past the great statue of Cardinal Lavigerie standing with his face toward the desert, his uplifted hand holding the crucifix clearly silhouetted against the sky. From the Cafés Maures there came a fitful sound of music—flute and voice and harsh tom-tom flung their echoes to the night. The black shadows of the houses were sharply outlined upon the streets, which seemed like fragile ivory in the moonlight. Overhead the stars in all their strange and beautiful splendor burned with extraordinary brilliance. A little wind crept out of the desert and touched their faces with soft caress.

"I am dying with curiosity to know all about Mrs. Amory," said Alix. "Is she a widow? And are you going to marry her, Jean, and establish yourself at Oued Zerqa forever and ever?"

His face in the moonlight was a study in iron self-control.

"She is not a widow, and I am not going to marry her," he said coldly.

"What is she doing at Oued Zerqa? Isn't her husband there? Why didn't he come to Biskra?"

"She is living there very quietly, alone with her little boy. The place belongs to her. I am her agent—her paid servant—I only look after it for her!"

Alix said "*Oh!*" with an odd little emphasis on the word which invested the monosyllable with a good deal of meaning.

"But she is your cousin also?" she said.

"Yes," he admitted.

"And does she treat you like a servant?" inquired Alix.

"Not exactly," he said.

"It is a romantic situation," she commented. "Are you in love with her, Jean?"

"Certainly not. Do not talk such nonsense, Alix. I have only known her for about a fortnight."

"She is very pretty and charmingly natural," said Alix. "Just what you like a woman to be, Jean. Where is her husband?"

"I don't know. And I don't believe that she knows either. She never speaks of him."

"He has left her?"

"I think he must have done so," said Jean.

"Perhaps she bored him?"

"Or—he may have bored her?"

"From the way she spoke—I think she loves him," said Alix thoughtfully.

"Very likely."

"It must be so humiliating to love in that way."

"In what way?"

"To love the hand that has made you bite the dust," said Alix; "like the Arab woman who loves the hand that beats her!"

She turned and faced him. The road stretched away white and lonely toward the desert. They were quite alone.

"You think she does love him?" she said rather persistently.

He was silent. He thought of the open door, guarded by Beni, at Oued Zerqa.

They entered the garden of the Villa Landon and stood by the wall, looking out on the desert. In the moonlight it looked very white and cold and dry. There had been no rain in Biskra for a long time, and the river-bed was dry; they could see the gleaming stones that marked its course between the deep banks. An Arab rode slowly past on a mule. There was no other sign of life, but in the distance they could hear the intermittent barking of the Kabyle dogs from some remote, unseen douar.

"Paul will be here to-morrow," she said softly.

"You have heard from him?" said Jean.

"He answered my telegram. He was going to fly this afternoon somewhere near Tunis—he is trying a new machine."

"Alix—marry him! Go back to Paris with him. You can be married quietly here from Elise's house. Give up this mad, wandering life!"

There was passion in his voice. Alix looked at him with narrowing eyes.

"Paul would want to be married in church. He still clings to that. I gave up my religion long ago, Jean. And I'd prefer my mad, wandering life, as you call it. I couldn't live in a city again. And I don't love him at all. His devotion wearies me. I only like to see him now and then, to assure myself that there is still one

person in the world who cares whether I am alive or dead."

"It would be better for him, then, if you were to leave him alone. Give him a chance of forgetting you—of marrying some nice girl who will love him and make him happy!"

"He will never forget me—you know that quite well!" said Alix proudly.

Her gray eyes were lit with a strange fire. "He wouldn't share my life, and I cannot share his. We are as far apart as the poles," she continued. "But I sent for him—I haven't seen him for a year. And he hardly ever writes to me."

"And you," he said, looking down at the pale, upturned face so carven and beautiful in the moonlight, "what are your plans? Are you going back soon to your tent?"

"Very soon. Perhaps to-morrow—when I have seen Paul!"

"For long?"

"Until I am tired of it."

"I think we ought to be turning back," he suggested.

"Oh, don't go yet. It isn't late. And I want to hear more about that pretty little Mrs. Amory!"

"I have told you all I know about her," said Jean.

"You must tell her that I really hope to come and see her at Oued Zerqa. I like her, Jean; she is pretty, and she didn't seem too much shocked at me. I thought she seemed a little sorry for me. I do mean to visit her."

They walked homeward. He accompanied Alix back to the hotel and then drove out to the villa. There was a light in Mrs. Amory's room. He found on entering that both ladies had gone to bed. In the hall he saw a telegram addressed to him. He tore open the flimsy blue envelope. It was from Paul.

"Tell Alix have met with accident flying. Come Tunis if you can. May be serious. PAUL."

CHAPTER XIX

JEAN DE VERNAY left for Tunis on the following day, but he was unable to persuade Alix to accompany him. She did not appear greatly upset at the news of Paul's accident, but she refused quite definitely to go to him. Indeed, she expressed her intention of leaving Biskra at once, and returning to the desert. Never before had Jean thought her so heartless. He knew his brother would be bitterly disappointed at her non-appearance, and he dreaded the effect it might have upon him. He started so early that there was very little time to make any preparations, and he could only explain the matter quite briefly to Elise, and beg her to tell Frances of his sudden and unexpected departure.

Mrs. Amory and David went back alone to the Blue River, and it was quite a month before Jean returned to Aïn-Safra. Paul had been very seriously injured by his fall, and it was feared that he might be permanently crippled. He was to remain in Tunis for the winter, and Jean had promised to pay him another visit later on.

After Christmas the weather became very wet, and Frances began to realize how desolate Oued Zerqa could be in winter-time. Torrents of rain and fierce storms of wind swept over the plain

of Azeba. News of bad weather, of tempests and shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, had filled the Algerian papers. From her window Frances could hear the deep, troubled murmur of the Blue River, as, swollen by the heavy rains, it dashed along its deep ravine, sweeping away great trees, and destroying the bridges that spanned it. In summer it was a tranquil stream, flowing calmly between high banks thickly clad with wild myrtle and cistus and golden broom, with here and there a group of oleander bushes flushing the forest ways with their fragile blossoms; but now it was a fierce torrent, greedy of life, swift to slay. Its angry murmur sounded cruel and relentless to Frances. Every morning Hafsi had some fresh story to relate of men or beasts drowned in the attempt to ford it.

To-day the weather had changed, and the sky was blue again. Frances was sitting in the veranda, wondering when David would return from Mass. He had been prevented from going for nearly a week. She knew that he would have made the effort if she had not forbidden him to do so. She feared his crossing those deep floods, and the road was so bad he could now only ride to Azeba.

After the recent rains the forest looked as if it had been newly washed, and then fitted out with fresh garments of lustrous green. The mountains were clearly outlined against the bright blue of the sky. Of late they had been so often hidden behind the wet silver fringes of cloud that wrapped them about as with a mantle. Even the plain had scarcely been visible through

the white mists that blotted and obscured all things.

It was about the middle of January, and Frances was beginning to feel that she had spent an eternity at Oued Zerqa. The time had passed peacefully enough. She had found plenty to interest her. Even in the bad weather she had not been bored, thanks to the books she had brought with her. She and David had read a great deal together, and she felt that they were learning to know each other better than had ever been possible before. She perceived that the boy was developing very rapidly in the silent solitudes of the Blue River; that his was a life of recollection and prayer, and that he was making daily quiet progress in that path on which his feet had been so surely set. The old priest of Azeba could only tell her that he was learning humbly and faithfully the secrets of the spiritual life. Her boy was in Divine keeping; he belonged to God. Remembering these words, she was careful to interfere with him as little as possible. The lives of the saints contain many examples of men and women who from their very infancy have appeared to be the recipients of Divine favors, so much so that they seemed secure from slight faults as well as from grave sin. The childhood of St. John of the Cross, of St. Philip Neri, of St. Aloysius, are but a few examples of those who have shown this strange dedication even of the very years of infancy to God. And side by side with this deep holiness and spirituality there has always been the deep humility that characterizes inevitably the saint; the endeavor to ren-

der that apparent security permanent by constant prayer and by every kind of austerity, of harsh penance, of mortification, and of changeless clinging to the guidance and succor offered by the Church.

She watched David in amazed thankfulness. He seemed to grow in affection and tenderness toward herself; he was docile and obedient, his habitual, uncomplaining content made her life of exile easy. He studied and worked with an unremitting diligence. But the church at Azeba claimed always those first morning hours. The priest had told her that David always served his Mass whenever he was able to be present, and that afterward he would kneel in prayer and meditation apparently quite oblivious of the passing of time. Often he went himself to remind the boy that it was growing late, and that he ought to return home. Frances wished that the church were less far off. David could hardly get there under half an hour, and during the floods he had to make a considerable *détour*, thus adding to the length of his journey. During the storms that had prevailed during the past week she had been obliged to forbid him to go. Even to-day there had been some risk, and she felt a little anxious about his safety. She felt relieved when she saw him coming up the path from the stables.

He had grown very much since they had left England, and was now tall for his age. He was slight of build, quick in his movements, like his father, but there all resemblance ceased. "My dear boy, you must be starving," she said.

"M. le Curé gave me some coffee before I

started," he said. "Is it breakfast-time? I hope you have not been waiting for me?"

"No," she said; "but you must want food. Tell Hafsi we are ready for breakfast."

He kissed her, and then went to find Hafsi. She watched him as he went. The beauty of his countenance was enhanced by its expression, which bore witness to a deep interior peace. He had been roughly deprived of all the advantages to which he had been accustomed, to the pleasures and luxury which belong to the children of rich parents, and he had been given in exchange a life of comparative poverty, of solitude. He had been deprived, too, of all companions of his own age, and there was little to relieve the monotony of his exile. But she could never remember that he had ever looked unhappy or discontented; indeed, he had always seemed perfectly cheerful, perfectly satisfied.

He had accepted without a word her request that he should discontinue his daily pilgrimage to Azeba during the bad weather. She felt that there could be only one future, humanly speaking, for David. He would belong always to the Church; he was already her faithful son. She knew that all his hopes, all his thoughts, were centered upon becoming a priest. He had asked the priest to direct his reading with this object in view. After his father he was Stephen's heir, but she knew that he would never claim his heritage. He was already set apart.

The very possibility of Aubrey's return, still so passionately desired, nevertheless began to fill Frances with a grave concern. What effect

would his influence have upon his little son? He was careless and contemptuous of those spiritual things he had wantonly cast aside. And here in this quiet and obscure life he would have greater facilities for influencing his son. She was obliged to envisage these things, though she shrank from the thought of them. How could David escape the temptation of judging and condemning his father? On the other hand, any intimacy between them might poison and corrupt the boy. It would mean, perhaps, that she would have to part from David, send him to school in England, keep him away from Aubrey. She could no longer look forward to her husband's return as the solution of all problems, as the consummation of that quiet happiness she was experiencing here.

It was about this time that, walking alone in the forest one afternoon, she found David sitting on the ground surrounded by a little army of birds. Some were perched on his shoulders, and she noticed that he held one in his hand, clasped against his breast. A curious stillness seemed to surround him. Was there some power in her boy that the wild and timid things of the forest should thus approach him without fear? At her sudden appearance the birds flew away with cries of alarm, with a beating of brown wings. She went toward him.

"David!" she said appealingly, yet half afraid to disturb him.

"Yes, mother?" He rose, and went up to her, slipping his arm in hers. His eyes were extraordinarily bright, his cheeks flushed; she had a

queer feeling that he looked as if he had seen a vision.

"The birds are not afraid of you," she said.

"No," he said; "they often come. Perhaps they know I wouldn't hurt them. But they never come when Beni is with me, so to-day I left him behind on purpose."

They walked homeward together along the banks of the Blue River. It was very quiet, and the sun made a mosaic of moving lights and shadows, mauve and gold in hue, as it flickered through the interlaced boughs of the cork and olive trees overhead. There was a feeling of spring in the air, and already the asphodels were showing slim spires of buds on their long stems.

She thought of St. Francis of Assisi preaching to his "little brothers, the birds," in the Umbrian woods, and of how that gentle, kindly, humane saint, filled with an ardent love for all things created by God, had clasped the birds of the fields and the singing cicada in his hands.

David did not refer to the subject again; he seemed, indeed, half ashamed that she should have seen him thus.

She drove into Azeba with David early on the following morning. There were very few people present in the little church, and she found herself watching her son's movements as he served the Mass. He gave her the impression of being attentive and recollected. All his actions were imbued with a grave modesty. She felt again, as she had done in London, that she was watching a stranger. She saw that he received Holy Communion, and that when Mass was

ended he retired into a corner of the church, and knelt there with his face hidden in his hands. He never stirred. She waited for some time, and finding that he did not move, she rose and went quietly to the presbytery to see the priest. She wished to speak to him about David. She was beginning to be afraid that his life of solitude was fostering unhealthy, unwholesome tendencies in the boy. There was something about him not quite normal. His physical health was good, but she feared this hidden spiritual life of his. The priest could advise her. She could not question David upon her own responsibility. These natures were delicate, and she feared to wound or hurt him, and still more to injure this spiritual progress which was alarming her by usurping apparently the boy's whole life. She was not sure that she wished him to be a priest. He was her only son and, good as she was, Frances had human ambitions for him. She wanted to see him take his place at Cold Mead. But long ago she had resolved never to interfere with him. His father might do so; it was almost inevitable that he should, but Aubrey had perhaps forfeited the right to order his son's future.

She knocked timidly at the door, which was opened by the priest himself.

"Come in, if you please, madame. You will accept a cup of coffee, I hope, after your long drive?"

He led the way into the little parlor. The room was rather bare and scantily furnished; it suggested a clean and wholesome poverty. A

table of rough wood, a few chairs, a small side-board comprised all the furniture. The floor was covered with red tiles; there was no carpet. On the distempered walls there hung a crucifix and a couple of cheap colored pictures of Our Lady and the Sacred Heart. The window was open, and the fresh, pure morning air entered like a fragrant caress. Breakfast was already laid, and Frances was glad to accept the hot coffee and roll of bread which were set before her.

"It is about my son," she said at last, "that I wish to speak to you, M. le Curé. I am anxious about him."

The priest knew all the details of Mrs. Amory's story; she had told him in the confessional when she first came to Azeba of the disasters that had driven her to seek the solitudes of the Blue River. But as the story had been told to him only in this way, he was prevented from alluding to it even to her.

"Yes?" he said, a little surprised. "Is he not well, madame?"

"Oh, he is well," she said. "He did not come here to Mass last week because I forbade him to do so on account of the floods. I thought it would not be quite safe. The bridge was washed away. Hafsi told me it was not safe for him to come alone."

"I know," he said, "the Blue River has been in her bad winter mood. But it will pass—it will pass. You did well to forbid him to come. He did not show any rebellion?"

"He never rebels, M. le Curé," she answered. "I—have wished sometimes that he would!"

He looked at her in astonishment. "You cannot really mean that, I think, madame?" he said in a tone of gentle remonstrance.

She broke out impetuously: "I cannot help seeing he is unlike other boys. It has always been so. When he was quite little I used to think if he were naughty sometimes, so that I could punish and then forgive him, he would seem more like my own child. But he has never been naughty. He seems to wish for a life of expiation. All the time he seems absorbed—apart. Do you think he is brooding over his father's fault?"

"No, madame—he does not brood. He prays continually for his father's return to the practice of his religion—at any cost. He loves him very much—he feels very keenly his father's separation from God. So much I may tell you."

"I don't interfere with him—do you think I ought to?" said Frances. "The only thing I do is to insist upon his having regular hours for recreation. He rides every day when the weather allows of it with M. de Vernay. But for the rest of the time he studies—he reads—he prays. Sometimes I insist upon his going for a walk. He obeys at once." She told him of her adventure in the forest, when she had found David surrounded with birds—the timorous wild birds of the forest that knew no fear of him.

"That interests me very much," said the priest, listening attentively to the recital. "It explains also certain things to me. I understand now why the Arabs in Azeba call him a marabout. Madame, I go a good deal among the Arabs

here. They come to me for medicine—for advice when they are sick. I have lived in Algeria so long that I have learned to speak their language, and they talk freely to me. I understand them as far as it is possible for one not of their own race and their own creed to understand them. A marabout is, as you know, a holy person, one favored by Allah, possessing often miraculous gifts, perhaps powers of healing. The Arabs ask him for prayers, for intercession. They regard him with superstitious reverence. And somehow they have begun to accredit your son with certain powers, and they call him the Boy Marabout."

She said: "They have seen it also, perhaps. I wish my boy were commonplace—normal—like other boys."

"He can never be that, madame—never so long as he continues to correspond in this wonderful way to the supernatural graces bestowed upon him in abundance—in abundance!" he repeated. "You must not wish him to be otherwise. It is wrong."

"It is true," she continued, "that he is never disobedient nor untruthful nor selfish nor passionate. He has a good disposition, and he is pious by nature. I—I can't find any fault with him. I believe, too, that he is courageous and manly. But he seems set apart—detached. Why is it?"

"Madame, I can only tell you that in spiritual things he is very far advanced, perhaps unnaturally so for a boy of his age. Yet when we read the lives of the mystic saints we find there was

nearly always this curious precocity in spiritual things. One does not know why, but it does seem that in some cases the Divine favors are spontaneously bestowed in great abundance on certain persons. I have believed for some time past that this was the case with your son. Madame, I in my long experience have never personally met with a case of this kind, and it was difficult for me to deal with it in a spiritual sense. I could only at first submit it to human tests, to see if it implanted that humility in the soul which such favors inevitably produce when they are the wonderful gifts of grace, the humility which recognizes that these favors are the gifts of God, to be given at His Will, to be withdrawn when He chooses. There is no pride in David; he is absolutely humble; he will never willingly speak of these things. He sees in himself the sinner only won back by redemption, by the immeasurable love of God who is calling him into His service. He is completely without spiritual pride. I have submitted him to every test I could think of. He is filled with charity."

Frances was silent. The old man went on:

"The lives of the mystics teach us that these Divine favors may be bestowed upon those who serve God faithfully. On the other hand, there are many who serve Him faithfully, daily and hourly, all their lives, who have never received these strange and ineffable consolations. But, as far as I can see, your son has passed through the first state—the Dark Night of the Soul—as St. John of the Cross has called it—he is upon the illuminative way. If you have finished your

coffee, madame, we will go back to the church for a few minutes."

She followed him out into the sunny garden, where daffodils and narcissi faintly perfumed the air with their incense, across the road, back into the quiet of the little church.

David was still kneeling as they had left him, but instead of being hidden in his hands his face was now visible, and was turned toward the Altar, and his eyes were open and fixed upon the Tabernacle in rapt adoration.

The priest went up and touched him on the shoulder.

"David—it is time to go——"

The boy did not move. He was, indeed, so unnaturally still that Frances grew alarmed, thinking he had fainted.

She put her hand on his. "David——" she said softly.

But he did not stir. The hand she had touched was icy cold; there was no color in his face, which was blanched with pallor. But his eyes burned with a steady, enduring, quenchless flame. And as she had felt in the forest, so she felt now—that he had the look of one who has seen—nay, who sees—a vision.

Without a word she obeyed the priest's gesture and followed him out of the church, treading softly, for fear of disturbing him.

He shut the door, and they stood on the steps in the hot sunshine. Frances had turned very pale; her face showed signs of unusual emotion.

"Madame—you see for yourself. I believe he is in ecstasy. I have found him thus before.

He did not hear us. He could not come back."

In silence they returned to the presbytery.

"You and I can do nothing," said the priest. "You will guard his body, and see that he does not injure his physical health. I have forbidden him to practise any mortifications unknown to me. That is sometimes a danger. I will do my best to watch over his soul, unworthy as I am to do this task. Do not be anxious. If he is a saint, God will doubtless visit him with many and bitter trials to prove him."

"He is only thirteen," said Frances; "he cannot begin to study for the priesthood for several years. I do not wish him to make up his mind too young. But all this is unfitting him for anything else—and you know he is the only son—the heir to a large property and great wealth. Do you think he should forego these responsibilities?"

"We must leave his future very humbly in God's hands, madame," he answered.

CHAPTER XX

SINCE his return from Tunis, Frances had seen very little of Jean de Vernay. He had kept studiously aloof, although he arranged for David to go down to Ain-Safra daily and accompany him in his rides through the forest. Probably Elise de Vernay had warned him of the inadvisability of his seeing much of her, Frances thought half resentfully. If she were to write and ask him to come, she knew that he would do so immediately, as a matter of obedience, and she felt that she could not do it. He was always busy, and she remembered with a pang that it was for her he worked so strenuously.

She was sitting alone one afternoon. It had been raining, and little pools of water showed on the paths of the terrace. A patch of blue sky shone just above the Needle Mountain, but the range of hills to the north was still completely hidden by heavy drifting banks of cloud.

As she sat there she heard the sound of horses' hoofs on the road below, and she rose and looked out of the window. She saw Jean riding slowly up the hill toward the house, coming from the direction of Ain-Safra. Now he was lost to sight temporarily between the high hedges of grotesque Barbary fig trees. She wondered if he were coming to pay her a visit.

He dismounted at the stables, and walked up to the house. Frances opened the window. "Will you not come in, M. de Vernay?" she said.

He glanced down at his boots thickly encrusted with the wet clay. "I am not fit to come in, madame. But I want to speak to you. I am in a dilemma."

He wiped his boots on a patch of wet grass and then entered the room. He thought it had never seemed so homelike and comfortable before. Everything spoke of Frances—her books, her work lay on the table; there were great bowls of narcissi, pallid freesias and fragrant violets; the room was full of their delicious scent. A big fire of thick, dried roots burned on the hearth; the smoke was faintly aromatic.

"You shall have some tea," said Frances, ringing a little handbell, in response to which Hafsi appeared.

"Now tell me all about your dilemma," she said. It was never easy to talk to Jean; she always had the feeling at the back of her mind that he disapproved of her presence at Oued Zerqa.

He produced a letter from his pocket; it bore a French stamp and the postmark of Paris.

"The courier brought me this letter yesterday, madame," he said; "it is from Madame de Méryville—a cousin of ours—she was one of Adolphe de Vernay's daughters. She has one little girl, called Josette, who must be about ten years old. It seems she is delicate—they are afraid that she may become consumptive if she spends the rest of the winter in the north. So she has written

to ask me to receive her and her nurse for the next three months."

"And you are going to do so?" said Frances, wondering what a delicate child would do in that bachelor and rather Spartan domain.

Jean waited a moment before answering; then he said: "On the contrary, madame, I intended to shift the responsibility. I came to suggest that you should receive her. Your house is larger, more airy, more comfortable than mine, which is all very well for an old bachelor like myself. There are the rooms that André built—they would do admirably, would they not?"

A child of ten? Frances Amory's heart sank at the prospect of undertaking this new responsibility. Something of dismay must have shown itself in her face, for Jean said quickly: "I beg your pardon, madame. I see that the prospect does not please you. Pray think no more about it. I will make arrangements to receive her at Aïn-Safra."

"I don't think I can decide immediately," said Frances. "You see, it is a great responsibility, and I am not at all accustomed to illness. David has always been strong—I have never had any anxiety about his health."

"Pray think no more of it," said Jean. "Forgive me for having suggested it."

His immediate acquiescence, his submission to her wishes, exasperated Frances. She felt that she would rather have heard him reproach her for her selfishness toward this sick child!

"You must let me think it over," she said, with some hauteur. "The courier does not go till to-

morrow, and if you can come here in the morning I will tell you my decision."

Jean drank his tea in silence. He fell to watching her. All her movements were pretty and graceful, and vaguely he thought that her hands were curiously beautiful, so white, so small, and yet so capable. And he felt, for the first time perhaps, a dull rage against the man who could have married this pretty and charming woman with the tender, spiritual face, and then left her, after steeping her in the disgrace and shame of his own life.

"Pardon, madame," he said. "I would rather withdraw what I have said. You came here for peace and solitude, did you not? A child might destroy it—especially a spoiled child like Josette."

Frances smiled. "Is she so spoiled?" she said. "But I think, perhaps, it would be good for David to have a companion. We shall grow selfish, I am afraid—we have no one to think of but our two selves. But come to breakfast to-morrow, and I will tell you what I have decided."

After he had gone she reflected that he seemed utterly unlike the man who had spoken to Alix Rezanoff with such spirited determination. This attitude of obedience, of subservience, was reserved for her alone. It made all intercourse between them impossible, and Frances dimly felt that this was his unspoken wish.

More and more she experienced the feeling that he disliked her presence at Oued Zerqa—that it made him more conscious of his dependent position, emphasizing it, and reminding him of

his obligation to her. Would he dislike her less, she wondered, if she offered shelter to little Josette de Méryville? At least she would feel that she was relieving him from an undesired burden, that she was granting him the first request he had ever made to her. But she rebelled against the prospect of giving up her peace and quiet to the undesired task of guarding another woman's sick and spoiled child. It was true that there were at Oued Zerqa the large, unoccupied rooms which André had built for his numerous family. They faced south, and would be admirably suited for a delicate child. Jean had, she knew, only two small rooms to place at the disposal of his guests, and his household was small and little adapted to receive Josette and her nurse. If she were poor he was even poorer, and the addition to his weekly books might prove a strain upon his meager income.

Jean presented himself at breakfast-time on the following day. He found Frances alone. She had just come from a walk in the forest with David.

"It is all settled," she said. "Anna and I have already been discussing the situation. She is very fond of children, and tells me she is quite a good nurse; so if Josette is ill here she can help her nurse to look after her."

The expected "Thank you, madame," did not come. Jean's rather grim face was set in hard lines.

At last, with an effort, he said: "It is very kind of you—very kind, indeed. Madame de Méryville will be most grateful." The abrupt

entrance of David interrupted his thanks, and he did not resume the conversation till they were all three seated at table.

"I feel that I have shifted the burden to your shoulders in a most cowardly way, madame," he said; "but I know nothing of children, and very little of sickness, and you will understand that for a bachelor like myself the prospect was decidedly alarming."

"I am sure it was," said Frances, "and we shall be delighted to have her here—shall we not, David?"

"Yes—I can take her for walks when she is well enough," said David. "I hope she will like the forest."

"I have written a letter for you to inclose with yours," said Frances to Jean; "and I have asked Madame de Méryville to bring Josette herself, and stay as long as she can to see her safely settled here. It will make the parting easier, will it not? as you say she is an only child."

"I am sure she will come if she can," said Jean; "but she can't leave home for long, on account of her husband, who is very delicate, and much older than herself. That made the matter of sending Josette south unusually difficult. They must have been very much puzzled to apply to me for help!" he added, with a rueful smile.

"And supposing the climate doesn't suit her?"

"In that case we might pass her on to Elise," he said; "but she would be better cared for here. She has always been adored by both her parents;

they worship her, and it will not be easy at first to compensate her for their absence."

After breakfast they went back to the little study, and Hafsi brought in the tray with coffee and cigarettes. He smoked for some time in silence.

"Have you heard anything of Alix Rezanoff?" she asked presently.

"Nothing whatever. I have no idea where she is; nor has Paul. Since his accident she has not written a single line to him!"

"He is still at Tunis?"

"Yes, madame, and he will probably never walk without crutches again, they tell me. Marriage for him would be out of the question now, but she might have sent him a word of sympathy."

"What a curious being she is! I have often wondered if she will remember her promise to pay me a visit here."

"Oh, she will appear one day without any warning," he said, "and ask you to put her up. It would be kind of you to receive her, for she has few friends now. You've seen her, and you know the kind of life she leads. A charmed life—one might think she had had the *anaïa* bestowed upon her."

"The *anaïa*?" said Frances, puzzled.

"Madame, it is a strange custom of the Arabs and Kabyles, and it is so ancient that one does not know its origin. But the marabouts of certain tribes have the power of bestowing a kind of safeguard, or shall we say passport, upon travelers and caravans, rendering them immune from

attack, even when going through very isolated and savage regions. It is respected with a superstitious reverence. To rob or kill a person upon whom it has been bestowed is a crime—a disgrace that can only be expiated by blood. Even the women of certain tribes have the power of giving it, and there is a story told of some sailors shipwrecked near Bougie who were attacked by the natives on whose shores they were cast, because they were suspected of having betrayed the Arabs to the French invaders. But one man, who knew of these strange customs, flung himself at the feet of a woman of this hostile tribe, and claimed the *anaïa*. He and his companions were saved—their lives were spared, in spite of the fact that they were known to be deeply compromised. I think sometimes Alix must have received it, since that one sharp warning which showed her that the Arabs feared her and desired her death.”

“Isn’t there any tangible sign of the *anaïa*?” asked Frances, deeply interested.

“Sometimes the marabout will give a small amulet or token belonging to his tribe, but it is not necessary. You can imagine the usefulness of the *anaïa* in the days when there were neither police nor troops, nor any laws to protect the caravans coming from the interior, with their precious loads of ivory, gold, and ostrich feathers.”

“It seems wonderful,” said Frances. “Perhaps Alix has obtained it.”

“She speaks lightly of the wound she received, but it was a very serious affair, and for many,

weeks she lay at death's door. The Caïd Ben-Mahmoud-bou-Ali and his sons undertook to avenge her, and her would-be murderer was killed by them. The affair was hushed up, and for a long time nothing was known of it. Ben-Mahmoud has remained her faithful friend, and permits the most complete intimacy between her and his women-kind. She even visits there occasionally."

"Where does he live?"

"In a small oasis of the Souf—I forget the name," said Jean, "but I have met him in Biskra. He is a very powerful, very ambitious man, and avaricious, like so many of the Arabs. His riches are said to be fabulous, but he is a gambler."

As Jean rose to go Frances said timidly:

"You are always so formal, M. de Vernay. We are cousins; you should call me by my name."

In an instant his face changed; he looked at her with hard eyes.

"I prefer not, madame," he said, with grave politeness. There was a finality, a determination in his tone that hurt her.

"Why not?" she said, flushing a little. "All my cousins call me Frances."

"I am in an inferior position, madame," he said; "I am your servant. Please forget that I am also—your cousin."

"You are my cousin. You are not my servant, M. de Vernay."

"I work for my bread. But for you I should be starving by this time in the desert, or earning a *sou* a day in the Foreign Legion!"

There was an indescribable bitterness in his tone.

"What does that matter?" said Frances gently; "the arrangement is one of mutual convenience."

"It matters a great deal," he said. "But please do not be offended with me, madame. Always I am your servant—your humble and faithful servant."

Bowing, he took leave of her, and she watched him as he rode slowly down the hill toward Aïn-Safra. There were tears in her eyes, not of anger nor sorrow, but of humiliation and wounded pride. In this matter her servant, very humble and very respectful, had definitely refused obedience. Her timid little advance had been politely repulsed; her pride had been wounded. Her face flamed at the remembrance, at the shame of having her request refused. Beni came up and thrust a cold, wet nose into her hand. She stooped and caressed his rough head and rubbed the short ears. "I don't want humble and faithful servants, Beni," she said. "I think I wanted a friend. I am sure, if you could speak, you would call me Frances, wouldn't you? No one ever calls me by my name—I shall soon forget to answer to it. And it hasn't been any use giving in about little Josette, and I only did it to please him. He is eaten up with pride!"

The blurred figure of that solitary rider had vanished, swallowed up by the great hedges of prickly pear and the avenues of carob and acacia trees. Silence had again fallen upon Oued Zerqa, broken only by the monotonous music of

the river, as it swirled onward toward the valley of Azeba. It seemed to Frances to possess a hungry and cruel sound, disturbing the silence and tranquillity of her forest fastnesses.

CHAPTER XXI

ABOUT ten days later Madame de Méryville announced her approaching arrival with her little daughter Josette. During the interval there had been a constant interchange of letters and telegrams, plans were made only to be abruptly altered; but finally it was settled that the mother should accompany her child, and remain for a week or so at Oued Zerqa, to see her settled there.

Frances went to Philippeville to meet them, and stayed at the hotel which was near the quay and possessed fine views of the sea, the harbor, and the beautiful Bay of Stora, with its overhanging mountains painted in tones of softest amethyst. David had gone to stay with Jean at Ain-Safra during his mother's absence.

The boat was not due until midnight, and in the evening Frances walked down to the harbor. One or two coasting steamers lay at anchor there, and numerous little feluccas, some of them laden with fragile cargoes of water-coolers of all shapes and sizes. The evening was fine, but there was a stormy-looking sky, and beyond the harbor the sea-line was dark, cut with lines of white foam. Through the clouds, heavy and wine-dark, the sunset had flung a golden fleece that made a frayed scarf of glory across

the western sky. The mountains were etched against it in somber purple relief, and the Bay of Stora was colored in every shade of chrysoprase and opal, with bars of green jade spangled as if with diamonds. After the milder airs of Azeba the strong wind from the sea was sharply reviving; it gave a new energy to Frances. She walked along the road that wound its curved way between the overhanging cliffs and the seashore. Here the thick brushwood clothed the hillsides as with a warm garment; the dark bushes of arbutus, myrtle, cistus and broom made an overhanging fringe of verdure. The sands were golden gray, and the gulls flying low across them seemed like winged silver scimitars. She came at last to Stora, a little village nestling against the side of the hill, with its white houses red-roofed; the sun-shutters painted gray, and the slim church spire in the midst. It was very Italian-looking, reminding her of the little white villages that lie on the seacoast beyond Genoa. Above were white villas standing in luxuriant gardens of orange and citron trees, perched high on the summit of the cliff, and looking straight seaward toward the Cap de Fer, which inclosed the bay on one side, a bold protecting promontory flinging its arm into the Mediterranean.

Frances went into the church. It was a pilgrimage church, its walls hung with innumerable offerings given for the most part by the pious Italian fishermen who formed the bulk of the population. She knelt down and prayed. England and Cold Mead seemed very far away.

Already the tragedy of her life was growing a little less poignant, her own grief less passionate. The figure of Our Lady, accounted miraculous by the fisherfolk, seemed to regard her with a tender compassion. Nearly six months had gone by since Aubrey had vanished, and there had been no news of him. She had fulfilled her promise to him to the very letter; his home was ready for him whenever he chose to come and seek her. Surely he would do so—surely he would come, even if it were only for a few hours. She seemed to see his face smiling at her across the shadows of the church—his eager, handsome face, with its proud, arrogant, conquering look. Surely one day he would brave even the risk of capture and come and see her at the Blue River. She wanted to hear his voice, to feel the touch of his hand, of his lips again. Tears flowed fast from her eyes. She prayed that she might be allowed to see him again. Her life at Oued Zerqa seemed to her then only a dream peopled with shadows, indefinite, indeterminate.

She went back to the village. It had begun to rain, and the wind was blowing violently from the sea. Its sound was like a harp, and the sea echoed its wild fugitive music. The storm excited Frances, and she turned her steps toward Philippeville with actual enjoyment. Her cheeks were flushed with the beating of the wind; her dark hair was damp with the rain. It was growing late, and she could see the rows of lights illuminating the hospital and barracks on the heights above the town. As she passed through the broad arcaded streets back to the hotel she

felt as if a new courage had been given to her. There were not many people about; the pavements were dark and shiny with the rain; from the harbor came the distant shouts of the sailors. She climbed up the stairs to her little room facing the sea, and for a long time she sat there near the open window, letting the rough wind blow against her face.

She dined alone at a little table in the restaurant, and afterward she went up to her room to rest. The wind had ceased, but it was still raining heavily, and the lights of the harbor were blurred. Frances could hear the steady splashing of the rain as she lay on her bed. The curtains were not drawn, but the sky was perfectly dark; there were no stars shining to-night.

Presently she was aroused by a knock at the door. She had been half asleep, and the sound startled her. She rose quickly and opened the door. The passage was ill-lighted, and the white-clad figure of an Arab servant stood there looking rather ghostly in the crepuscule. There was a gentleman waiting in the *salon* to see madame, he said. She went downstairs quickly, wondering who it could be; for one wild moment, she almost persuaded herself that it must be Aubrey—Aubrey who had come back in answer to her passionately uttered prayers that afternoon in the little pilgrimage church at Stora.

As she entered the room she saw a man standing near the window. He was alone, and as she approached he turned his head, and then came a step toward her. It was Jean de Vernay.

"Why have you come? Has anything hap-

pened to David?" Across her bitter disappointment she felt so tired and nervous and uncontrolled that she made no attempt to conceal her emotion, and her eyes were wet with tears.

Jean's eyes regarded her coldly; his thin face was oddly set.

"Do not be alarmed, madame. Nothing has happened. I have left David at Azeba with M. le Curé. He would have been perfectly safe at Aïn-Safra, but I thought you would prefer that he should be at Azeba in my absence."

"Why have you come?" she repeated, more than ever mystified.

"I knew the steamer would be delayed," he said; "and I telephoned to the company, and heard she could not be in till after midnight." He spoke in a careful, mechanical voice. "I thought it would be imprudent for you to go on board so late—alone. So I decided that I would ride over, and go and meet Madame de Méryville myself. Under the circumstances, there will be no need for you to sit up—you can defer seeing them until the morning."

His eyes rested on her face with a cold, hard glance of scrutiny. She felt incapable of speech; something in his manner repelled her.

"Surely it was unnecessary," she said at last in a constrained voice. "You could have sent Hafsi to accompany me, and then you need not have put yourself to so much inconvenience."

"It does not inconvenience me," he said gravely. "I ought to have arranged to come myself in the first instance. Still, if Madame de Méryville had arrived at five o'clock, the sched-

uled time, you could have gone to meet her quite easily. I could not send Hafsi. He must guard your house."

"You don't wish me to go on board?" said Frances.

"It will be quite unnecessary. Perhaps, if they are very late, and if Josette is asleep, Madame de Méryville may prefer to remain on board to-night, instead of disturbing her. I am staying with a friend in Philippeville, and I will not detain you any longer, madame. You look tired," he added.

He raised her hand and kissed it. "Good-night," he said.

"Good-night," said Frances.

At the door he paused.

"You are quite comfortable here? You have everything you want?" he said.

"I am quite comfortable, thank you. I have all I want."

She came a step nearer.

"Just now—when you came——" she stammered, "you startled me—I could not imagine who it could be. For the moment I thought—I thought——" She stopped.

"Yes, madame—you thought?"

"I thought you might be Aubrey—my husband——"

His lips curved in a contemptuous smile; his dark eyes swept over her pale beautiful face; he did not speak. He turned away, and she could hear the swift and light falling of his footsteps on the hard tiles of the passage.

She went back to her room, and this time she

undressed and got into bed. But she could not sleep. It seemed that Jean's face, cold, hard, a little contemptuous, haunted her. Life at the Blue River would have been so much easier, she felt, without this hostile, antagonistic presence. Frances was so little accustomed to being disliked that she felt humiliated by this man's attitude toward her. He had shown her, too, that he considered her incapable of helping Madame de Méryville on her arrival, and he had come without a word to undertake the task himself. He had deliberately put her on one side. She had felt compelled to explain the cause of her emotion to him, and he had treated it with a silent contempt; she felt that she could never forget the look in his dark eyes as he turned and left her. He must regard her as silly and emotional, perhaps hysterical. He had no pity for her, only scorn, perhaps because she could continue to care so deeply for one who cared so little for her that he would not even tell her his whereabouts, and had dragged her remorselessly through the very dust, steeping her in his own shame. Yes, Jean was making her life at the Blue River unbearable. And why had he come to-night? It was quite unnecessary, and his coming had disturbed and unsettled her.

She fell asleep at last dreaming of Aubrey—of Aubrey wandering a beggared outcast in some far-off and unknown wilds where she could never find him—of Aubrey who had brought such bitter disgrace upon her and her child and whom she loved still with all the love of her heart.

When she awoke the sun was shining brightly through the unshuttered windows, and she found that her pillow was wet with the tears she had shed in her dreams.

When Frances went downstairs into the restaurant she found Madame de Méryville, with Jean and Josette, sitting at a little table having their morning coffee. They all three rose at her approach, and Madame de Méryville impulsively kissed her. "Dear Mrs. Amory—I can never thank you enough for your goodness. You are an angel of charity to burden yourself with my little girl. Josette, speak to thy Aunt Françoise!"

Josette was a slim elfin child, with fair glossy hair tied on the right side of her forehead with a pale blue ribbon. She had big, dark eyes, and a skin more pale than fair. With the fearless friendliness of the indulged child, who beholds a potential, if not an actual, friend in every one, she greeted Frances with an eager affection that touched her. All through the meal she chattered and laughed with much gaiety, relating all her recent experiences—the long journey in the train, her paroxysms of seasickness on the boat, her terrible sufferings, with considerable animation.

Her mother made no attempt to restrain the child's flow of conversation; perhaps it was a relief to every one present to be able to listen to it rather than to have to speak themselves. Madame de Méryville was a little worn out with the

journey, and with having to minister to the said sufferings, since the nurse had been rendered useless from seasickness.

The child was not actually ill, but she had inherited a certain delicacy of constitution from her father, and the doctors had recommended a sojourn in the south as likely to prove beneficial. Madame de Méryville had not then known of Frances Amory's presence at Oued Zerqa, and had written almost in despair to Jean de Vernay, imploring him to receive Josette. Mrs. Amory's letter, which had been forwarded to her by Jean, had filled her with the most profound gratitude. Here was a woman with a child of her own who would take in and tend the little Josette! "This dear, good Jean—he arranges all," she had said to her husband, "and here is a beautiful home waiting for Josette. I am sure this Françoise is a saint, and will take care of her as if she were her own child!"

Jean had advised Madame de Méryville to hire a carriage for the journey to Oued Zerqa, as the day was fine. They started for Azeba soon after luncheon, and little Josette was filled with delight at the beautiful scenery through which they passed—the orange orchards, hung "with bright lamps of gold to shame the day;" the white, winding road, with its enchanting views of the mountains; the forests of cork and olive; the hedges starred with the great blossoms of blue convolvulus. At last, from the summit of the hill, they came in sight of the town of Azeba lying in the midst of the plain, with its clustered houses and groves of feathery date-palms, and

sharply pointed, velvet-black cypress trees. Tall, gray poplars, with leaves that turned to silver as the wind shook them in the sunshine, rimmed the banks of the Blue River, of which they caught glimpses far below them, winding through its deep wooded ravines.

They drove through the white streets of Azeba, with its gay little shops and cafés, and its groups of indolent Arabs, who scarcely stirred to let the carriage pass. Dogs lay asleep in the roadway, and chickens ran about clucking in the dust. Josette looked with keen interest at the little Arab girls with their bright head-dresses and graceful cotton robes, their slim wrists and ankles encircled with silver bracelets and *khal-khals*.

On their way they stopped at the presbytery, but found that David had already ridden back to Oued Zerqa on his pony. They continued their journey, and it was not long before they arrived at the doors of the house.

"Is this really your house, Aunt Françoise? And what a lovely garden! Is one permitted to gather the oranges sometimes and eat them?" asked little Josette, eagerly looking up at the bright, shining fruit.

"One is always permitted, as long as one does not eat too many," said Frances, smiling. "David—David!" she called.

David came out. He greeted the newcomers and kissed Frances eagerly. Then he shook the tree, greatly to Josette's delight, and she scrambled to pick up the golden globes of fruit. The boy laughed as he watched her.

Presently they all went indoors, and Frances led the way upstairs, and opened a door on the right. The room was filled with sunshine, and the warm air drifted in languidly from the open casements. She and Anna had made the place look pretty with fresh chintz curtains and some bright native rugs. Two white beds at the further end of the room, a big wardrobe, a chest of drawers, and a dainty little dressing-table, had been arranged for the reception of Josette, who appeared enchanted at her new surroundings.

"It is very pretty! Is this really my room? So large—I can run races in it!" She danced excitedly across the room, her light feet scarcely touching the red tiles.

"Darling, thou wilt tire thyself! Keep still now. The poor Aunt Françoise will be tired with so much noise and chattering! Look at thy cousin, so composed and serious!" admonished Madame de Méryville, taking her child's hand. Then, turning to Frances, she said: "Indeed, I am unhappy to think you should have been so disturbed—it was Jean whom we wished to inconvenience. You must blame him, not me, Mrs. Amory."

"But, indeed, you have not disturbed me. I am delighted to have her. David and I were becoming so elderly and serious—she will keep us both alive!" said Frances, already won by the eager, bright ways of Josette. "I often used to wish for a little girl of my own!"

"Oh, I shall leave her so happily with you, madame," said Madame de Méryville. "I know

you will love her and be kind to her." Her eyes rested upon Josette with an expression of almost hungry anguish. "It is terrible—the thought of parting with her. I have not told her yet that I am going to leave her here and go back to Paris. But Jean has written much of you, madame—he told me that I could with confidence place my child in your care! Oh, yes, he is full of admiration for you and your son."

Frances looked at her in amazement.

"Oh, is he?" she said incredulously. "I have always been under the impression that he did not like my being here. But it was the only home that was left to me since—since we lost our fortune," she added hesitatingly; "and I did not like the idea of staying in England."

"And you like it—the life here? You do not find it too lonely, madame—so far away from your friends?"

"No," she said. "It is very quiet, of course, and there is not a great deal to do. But so far we have not been bored here. And David is happy."

But she could not help wondering what motive had prompted Jean to praise her in his letters to Madame de Méryville. Perhaps he did not really dislike her so much as she thought; perhaps, indeed, he was growing accustomed to having her as a neighbor. The memory of last night's interview quickly chased these flattering ideas from her mind, and the remembrance of his look, so coldly critical, filled as she thought with a kind of contemptuous compassion, came back

to her with a little stab of pain. He was her servant, her dependent, and he hated the position, and never missed an opportunity of displaying his resentment. Why, then, should he praise her thus unasked to Madame de Méryville?

CHAPTER XXII

Poor little Josette! The day came when she had to learn that no longer would her mother occupy the second white bed in the spacious, sunny room at Oued Zerqa, and that she herself was to be left under the care of her Aunt Frances and Marcelle, the nurse, with David for her constant companion in her walks and games. Not one of these people, whom she already loved, could compensate for the absence of her adored mother. Frances had quite dreaded to be the witness of this parting; it hurt her to think the child should so early experience so great a sorrow. Josette clung to her mother when the day came, sobbing convulsively, and refusing to let her go. Madame de Méryville emerged exhausted and pale from the struggle. She kissed her little girl repeatedly, calling her by every endearing and loving name, and imploring her to be good and obedient, and to do all that Aunt Frances told her. She assured her that soon, very soon, she would return and fetch her. She must make haste and get rid of her cough, and then she would be allowed to return to Paris. The words fell on heedless ears, for Josette had cried herself ill, and nothing now could check her uncontrolled and hysterical sobbing. With one last kiss upon that hot, wet lit-

tle face, Madame de Méryville withdrew from the clutch of those tiny hands, and went quickly downstairs. Jean was waiting to drive her back to Philippeville in his dog-cart. He helped her into it, and then sprang in beside her. They drove away, and the sound of wheels and retreating hoofs evoked a fresh access of sobbing from Josette, who now realized that her mother had indeed gone.

During the whole of her short life she had never before been parted from her for a single day. She had always shared her parents' life to an extent unknown to English children, having her meals with them, and accompanying them, whenever it was possible, in their walks and drives. That her mother could so consent to abandon her filled her with a sense of loss that was like a demolition of all familiar and assured things. The child's world is so essentially a thing of immutable foundations, of complete and sheltered safety, and so secure in its fortifications, that to find the fabric suddenly unstable is to stand in the midst of a disordered desolation. Nothing could any more spell permanence and safety to the unhappy Josette. Disillusionment as well as sorrow filled her heart. She had never believed that she could be parted from her mother, still less that her mother could wilfully impose such a parting upon her. Frances put her arms round her, murmuring words of consolation; but nothing she could do was of any avail.

Beni stole up and licked her hand with a dog's instinctive knowledge that something in this baby's life had gone awry, but he, too—a favorite

in happier days—was powerless to comfort. Her sobs alarmed Frances; they seemed to shake the frail little body with their uncontrolled violence.

"She will be ill, madame," prophesied Marcelle, who had already begun to view a prolonged sojourn at Oued Zerqa with considerable misgiving. "She can never live apart from her mother—it is enough to kill her!"

"Mamma! Mamma! Little mamma!" came the despairing cry from the bed.

The hours wore on. Sometimes she slept fitfully through sheer exhaustion, sobbing still in her sleep. Frances remained in the room, anxious and a little alarmed by the excessive emotion displayed by the child. The wheels of the dog-cart heralding the return of Jean made a welcome sound to her ears. She was just going down to see him when Josette awoke and started up with a shriek. "There is the carriage—she has come back—she has come back!"

"Ask M. de Vernay to come up, please," said Frances. Marcelle hurried down to execute this command, and returned almost immediately in the wake of Jean. It was a relief to Frances to hear his quick footstep, to see his face, grave, composed, emotionless.

"I can do nothing. She has taken no food all day, and had but little sleep. What am I to do?"

"Give her to me, madame," he said, and lifted the child in his arms. He carried her to the window and opened it, allowing the cold air to rush in upon her face, swollen and distorted with

weeping. It seemed to revive and calm her, and she was now perfectly unresisting. He sat down, and she lay quietly enough, with her cheek against the rough tweed of his coat.

"Will you not go and rest for a little, madame? You must be very tired."

Feeling bruised and rather worn out, Frances went to her room and lay down on the sofa. She must have slept for some little time, when a knock sounded at the door. She started up. Darkness had fallen; it must be getting late. Through the window she could see the stars shining with a cold and frosty brilliance, and the palms were etched blackly against the sky. She groped her way to the door and opened it.

Jean stood in front of her.

"She is in bed and sound asleep," he said. "I hope she will sleep all night. I have given her a little soup."

"Thank you," said Frances. Then she added: "After all, you would have made a better guardian for her than I can."

"Oh, there was nothing to be done," he said; "she was only exhausted when I came, and ready to give in. To-morrow I hope David will play with her. Children always understand each other best. I don't think it will do her any harm, although at present she is worn out."

He paused a moment, surveying her with his keen, hard glance.

"Madame de Méryville wished me to thank you again for your kindness—she felt that she did not sufficiently express her gratitude, which is very profound!"

"I am glad to have been of use," said Frances coldly.

"Good-night," he said.

"Good-night," said Frances.

She wondered what charm Jean had used, for on going upstairs after dinner that night she found Josette enjoying a deep and apparently dreamless slumber. But whatever it was it proved abundantly effective, for the sun was high in the heavens, and was speeding well on the way of his giant's course, before the child awoke.

As Frances wrote her letters that morning she could hear the two children laughing and shouting in the garden, scampering after each other along the white paths. She watched them playing under the orange trees, shaking down the bright fruit. Beni was participating in their revels with the utmost enjoyment, and Josette's gay voice was unsubdued by the emotions of the preceding day.

"I do hope she is going to be happy here," thought Frances, going back to her writing. But the thought of the bereft mother returning to France, sailing northward alone across the gray waste of waters, filled her with sadness.

Jean de Vernay proved a large factor in the ultimate consolation of Josette, although she wept from time to time with unrestrained grief for her absent mother. It was astonishing to Frances to see how quickly he accommodated himself to her childish ways, her baby exigencies, her imperious little commands, which he obeyed

with the same alacrity evinced by David and Beni.

Josette, in fact, ruled the household, and every one combined to console her by giving way to all her whims; but, indeed, there was so much charm in her sunny disposition, so much unselfishness and thought for others, that it would have been difficult to spoil her.

Jean was her faithful playmate in his few and precious spare hours, when David was absorbed with his lessons, and when he came to Oued Zerqa he scarcely left her. The friendship was a close and intimate one, and it showed Jean in a new and far more agreeable light to Frances.

He was less formal, less grave; there was even at times a touch of boyishness in his demeanor; he came more often to the house.

"You are coming to-morrow, Uncle Jean? Withut fail to-morrow? David—you see for yourself how occupied he is, and he cannot leave his studies. So you will come?"

"Perhaps," said Jean evasively.

"No—not perhaps. You must come—without fail! Aunt Frances, insist upon his coming!"

"It is possible that I may not have time."

"You must make the time. Aunt Frances—he must—mustn't he?"

Frances smiled. "Perhaps he wants to go somewhere else," she said.

"See here, little one—if I do not look after Oued Zerqa, there will be no more bread and butter for any one!"

"But to-morrow—you shall have a holiday the next day," she urged.

It generally ended with a promise on Jean's part that he would come—yes, he would come early, he would stay a long time, would finish the story, and play in the garden, and, indeed, promote whatever pastime her caprice suggested. Never was there such an autocrat. Never were refusals met in so sorrowful a manner. "Mamma would never have refused. But mamma loved her darling child, and would never, never, never make her unhappy by refusing!"

Hafsi was also soon numbered among her slaves. She ordered him about without mercy, and his grave face was always suffused with smiles when she addressed him.

Twice a week she wrote long letters to her mother. The task was undertaken voluntarily, but with great solemnity, as if it were the performance of a rite. "It is the day for the courier, is it not, Aunt Frances? It is necessary for me to write a long letter, David—I shall not be able to play with you this morning. You can study undisturbed!"

Seated at a small table in Frances's study, she examined and wiped her pen carefully, brandished it with professional ardor, and proceeded to her task. Only occasionally was Frances called upon to assist her in the composition and spelling of these epistles. She performed this filial duty with conscientious regularity, however much the bright sunshine might allure her gardenward, however vociferously Beni might drag

at her skirt with his teeth, barking and yelping and intimating that he desired her company outside. "This is business of importance, Beni," she would inform him. "No time for little dogs this morning!"

Industrious and absorbed, she seldom spent less than two hours over the task. Sometimes she wept a little at the thought of this dear mamma so desolate in Paris without her, and then Frances would tactfully suggest that the letter was now long enough.

A contemptuous rebuke met this suggestion. "Only one little page, Aunt Frances? That would not please poor mamma much!"

The tears were dried and the task courageously resumed. Frances, Jean, David, Marcelle, and Hafsi were all faithfully mentioned. These were the important and familiar dramatis personæ of her little world. Nor was M. le Curé left out, since he came every week to instruct her in the catechism. By the time she returned to Paris she would doubtless make her First Communion on the Feast of Corpus Christi. All these things were faithfully recorded. Aunt Frances was teaching her to speak English, and she did lessons for an hour every day. There was a baby jackal which David had found hurt in the forest, and which he had brought home. It was now quite tame, and ate out of his hand, and ran about with her and David and Beni. Beni was very gentle with it. And so on. The letters were full of such trivial things, but Frances felt sure they would be all

the more welcome on that account, showing Madame de Méryville that her child was happy, and able to take an interest in her new life.

"Aunt Frances, have you no little girl?" she inquired one day, pausing in the throes of composition, the end of her pen poised thoughtfully between her lips.

"No," said Frances.

Impossible to take offense at this childish questioning.

"You have never had one?"

"No."

"Not even one that died?" pursued the questioner.

"No—not even one that died."

"Mamma had a little boy baby who died," said Josette. "Older than me. But he died before I was born. Mamma cried—it made her very sad, so Marcelle says. You are married, are you not, Aunt Frances?"

"Yes, Josette," said Frances.

"Did you ask the good God to send you a little girl?"

"Yes—I used to ask."

"You should have made a novena to St. Joseph," said Josette; "that is what mamma did when her baby boy died. I heard Marcelle tell her sister so—she thought I was asleep. The sister had no children, and seemed unhappy, and Marcelle recommended her to do this. She said that was why I was called Joséphine. Perhaps you did not make a novena to St. Joseph, Aunt Frances."

"I don't think I did. But had you not better go on with your letter? Hafsi will be coming soon to take it to Azeba."

She was beginning to fear there might be further inquiries of a more intimate nature, such as where her husband was now. Josette obediently went on with her writing, and when the letter was finished she brought it over to her aunt to read.

At the end Frances read these words:

"Please ask the good God to send Aunt Frances a little girl. He has never sent her one."

Frances folded up the letter and put it in an envelope, which Josette proceeded to address with great care.

"Now the stamp, Aunt Frances. May I use your little sponge? Now I will put a kiss just here on the envelope, and mamma will touch the place with her fingers when she opens it!"

CHAPTER XXIII

FRANCES stood in the veranda looking out upon the fields that dipped down green and fertile toward the plain of Azeba. It was the hour of evening prayer, and she knew that from the mosques of the big cities of Algeria the *muezzin* would cry aloud the call to prayer from the little jutting balconies of the minarets, and that in many places his cry would mingle with that other call to prayer, the *Angelus* sounding from the Catholic Church, with its passionate appeal for a moment's recollection, wherein the faithful of her children might recall the great mystery that lies at the heart of the Christian faith.

She saw an Arab come quietly, indolently, into the field. It had been raining heavily, and he took off his heavy burnous and laid it on the ground. He seemed to be quite alone. He did not know that any one was watching him. Muffled in his white garments, with a white turban folded about his head, his legs and feet were bare, and resembled those of a bronze statue. He stood erect, facing eastward, then he bowed his head and fell upon his knees; lastly he prostrated himself until his forehead touched the wet grass. He remained in this position praying, then he rose and repeated these gestures and movements and prostrations. As he crouched

there prostrate, with forehead touching the ground, he seemed quite immovable, a mere patch of whiteness dividing the greenness of the grass. Then he rose, put on his rough brown burnous, and walked with the same indolence toward the forest, and was lost to sight behind the hedges of gray prickly pear.

Spring was now well on her way; February would soon yield to March, and the forest ways were made rosy and beautiful by the mists of blossoming asphodel. The brushwood on the hills was faintly tinged with the brilliant gold of the broom; delicate emerald tints decked the trees.

Frances had now been at Oued Zerqa for more than four months, and her life, quiet and eventless as it was, was yet full of interest. Her wounds had begun to heal, and she felt happier and physically stronger. As she watched the Arab praying many thoughts came into her mind. She felt that it was far easier to pray at Oued Zerqa than it had ever been in her busy London life. She had often had but little time to pray there. As a Catholic she had faithfully practised her religion so far as it was obligatory, but there had not been time for much more. And she had not even observed there her son's steady progress in the spiritual life. He had not spoken of these things to her, and she did not question him. She had seen vaguely the attitude of his mind toward religion, and this indefinite knowledge satisfied her. Once or twice she had dreaded that Aubrey might interfere, but Aubrey had never remarked the matter sufficiently to think of inter-

fering; he had let David go his own way without caring what that way might be.

Frances had seen that the Arabs—this alien race that peopled the country—thought a great deal of prayer. They prayed assiduously and regularly, however mistakenly. They had been quick to observe the religious tendencies of her boy, and had come to regard him with a strange superstitious attention. David was quite unaware of this. She felt, indeed, that had he known anything of it he would have been rather horrified than otherwise, so great was his humility, so complete his silence upon the subject.

The Arabs had, however, noticed it, and had bestowed upon him the name of the Boy Marabout. Frances felt compassion for these people, so pious in many ways, so faithful in the practice of their religion, so assiduous in prayer, who yet had not the true faith to guide and sustain them. She had learned, since coming to Algeria, that many visitors to North Africa had professed displeasure that any attempts should have been made to convert them, to impose the Cross where the Crescent had reigned; she had even heard the French blamed for making some of the mosques into churches. They seemed entirely to overlook the fact that the Cross had held its undisputed sway in Numidia long, long before the prophet Mahomet arose to preach to a nomadic and ignorant people his strange garble of Jewish and Christian law. For very fruitful in saints was Numidia in the old days of persecution. The Cross had been firmly planted there in Roman days, the Church so powerful had been fortified

by the long teaching of St. Augustine, and watered by the blood of many martyrs. There was the simple, half-obliterated slab at Constantine, showing where the humble gardeners of Cirta, St. Marius and St. Jacobus, had won their everlasting crown; there was the cross near the sea at Carthage, where St. Cyprian met his death, a spot sanctified afterward by the farewell of St. Augustine and St. Monica, when he left her to go to Rome; there was the chapel not far from there which marked the Roman amphitheater where St. Perpetua and her companions, fragile women of boundless courage and immovable faith, were flung to the wild beasts. Who shall say, then, that the Catholic Church has not the first right to that soil drenched with the blood of her martyrs, and echoing still across the centuries with the words of her saints? It is her proud heritage, bought with a great price.

As if in answer to her meditation, Frances heard the faint, far-off sound of a bell—the *Angelus* ringing from the church at Azeba. She knelt down, hid her face, crossed herself, and said the prayers.

When she rose and looked again from the veranda she saw Jean de Vernay walking toward the house, holding little Josette by the hand. She could hear them talking and laughing; they were the best of friends. Beni bounded beside them, wagging his tail. She went to meet them. She was accustomed to see Jean's face change as she approached, growing always, as she fancied, a little hard, with the set, resolute lines about the mouth, and the coldly critical expression in the

dark eyes It had almost ceased to hurt her now. "I have been so spoiled," she thought pitifully; "I seem to mind people being indifferent and hostile—people who don't really matter, like Jean."

"I came to ask you, madame, whether you would care to go to the quarries at El-Garah tomorrow. We could start early and breakfast there, and the children might come with us."

"I should like to go very much indeed," said Frances. "Is it far, and does it belong to me?"

"It is about twenty kilometers from here," he said, "and the road is not very good the last part of the way. Yes—it belongs to you—it was part of your grandmother's inheritance."

"Oh, we must all go, must we not, Aunt Frances?" cried Josette joyously. "It will be perfectly delightful." She seized Beni and rolled him over in the dust, a process which he endured with shrill yelps of mingled pleasure and discomfiture.

The marble quarries of El-Garah lay between Oued Zerqa and the sea, and were perched on the rather precipitous side of a mountain. The house, built on a lower spur, was scarcely visible from the road, so immense were the trees that sheltered it. It was now inhabited by an overseer and his wife, who occupied only a few rooms in the long, low, dilapidated building. The garden, from neglect, had become a tangled wilderness, half overgrown with brushwood. It was a lonely place, but not without beauty. A great mass of bougainvillea tossed crimson gar-

lands of blossom over the low roof, making a patch of brilliant color amid the surrounding gray-green of ilex and cork trees.

"It seems to want doing up dreadfully," said Frances, regarding it; "it looks so desolate!"

"It serves very well," said Jean. "We keep the overseer's apartment in repair. The rest"—he shrugged his shoulders—"it has been let from time to time in the summer months, and then I have done anything that was necessary. But perhaps another year it might be possible to spend a certain sum upon it."

"I should like to have it done up," said Frances. "And the garden is a terrible wilderness."

The porch was hung with a tangle of blue convolvulus twining over the gray, gnarled bark of the wistaria that so far showed no sign of budding. Grass and brushwood had overgrown what had once been a terraced garden. A group of Aleppo pines sobbed with monotonous music as the wind drifted past them—the wind, with its cool, fragrant touch of the sea. Tall, straggling eucalyptus trees, with their silvery stripped stems luminous in the sunlight and a few grim spires of cypresses gave shade to the garden. Here and there some white stars of narcissus and a few yellow daffodils showed their flowers through the long coarse grass. Some bushes of gorse, brilliant with golden sprays of blossom, seemed to fling a kind of challenge to the desolation by which they were surrounded. Here in this fold of the mountains the sun's rays came late and went early.

The front windows were closely shielded with gray outside shutters, from which the paint had half peeled off. The iron bell was rusty, and the steps were green with moss and damp.

Frances shivered. "What a depressing place! I can't bear to think it is mine. I almost hate it, M. de Vernay. Is it haunted?"

"By bats and owls, and probably rats, madame. I never heard of a ghost. But come in—the rooms are really not so bad."

The overseer's wife came out to greet them rather effusively, and said that breakfast would be ready in about half an hour. She unlocked the front door with a great rusty key that grated harshly in the unaccustomed lock, and they went into the dark hall.

"Perhaps madame would like to see all over the house? This room was known as the studio." She went before them, and opened a door down a passage to the right. The little party followed her into a spacious and lofty room. Scarcely any light penetrated through the chinks of the closed wooden shutters that were fastened across the windows, screened too with heavy curtains, thick with dust.

Jean's first action was to draw back the curtains. The tarnished rings yielded reluctantly to his efforts. He opened the casements, and unfastened the shutters that creaked as he pushed them back. A stream of ardent golden sunlight poured like a flood into the room.

"All this part of the house has been shut up for some years. The last tenant lost his little girl here, and abandoned the place suddenly,"

said Jean. "It would do no harm if these windows were opened occasionally."

The paper, an old-fashioned red flock one, was in many places peeling from the walls; elsewhere it showed moldy, yellowing patches, with scarcely a trace of its original color. The gilt cornice was dark and tarnished with years of neglect. Dust lay thickly on the bare-boarded floors and the scanty furniture. Everything of use or value had long ago been removed to furnish the house at Oued Zerqa.

The sudden brilliant light invading that sullen and gloomy obscurity almost blinded Frances, and the cloud of dust that assailed them as Jean drew back the curtains seemed to choke her. When she was able to distinguish details she saw a solitary object resting on a rough wooden table stained with paint of various hues. It was the half-finished marble statue of a little girl. Darkened with dust and mildew as it was, she could still discern the beauty of the child's features, of the pose, of the admirable fidelity to life. The eager, delicate face, the clustering curls, the bare limbs, the outstretched arms and tiny hands, were executed with extraordinary skill. A cloud of soft drapery floated about the form garment-wise, scarcely concealing the lithe beauty of the childish figure. The feet were poised as if she were running. Frances had the impression that she was indeed running toward her on swift, hurrying feet, with eager hands outstretched to greet her. The same thought had evidently occurred to Josette, for she rushed toward the statue in an ecstasy of delight.

"Look—look—Uncle Jean—Aunt Frances—she runs—she runs!"

Unfinished as it was, and roughly executed as if the artist had hurried over his work, it was yet vital and significant, full of life.

"Has it got a history?" asked Frances, turning to Jean.

"Yes, madame," he said, "and a sad one. Some years ago I let these rooms for a few months in the summer to a Frenchman from Tunis; he was a widower, and came here alone with his little girl. His trade was to point in marble the plaster work of sculptors—a more or less mechanical process which enables the statue to be easily chiseled by the artist himself. For years he had been engaged at this task, but he was an artist as well as a craftsman, and while here he determined to model a statue of his little girl. Then, wishing to execute it in marble, he had a block brought in from the quarries. Day after day he stole an hour or two from the child's playtime to work at it. She was a good, obedient little model, she kept very still and quiet. I used to see him sometimes at work when I came over here. But as the autumn days drew on the weather became very wet and unusually cold for the time of year. Madame can see from the position of the house that it does not get much sun; it is built for heat rather than for cold. The August heats are so very intense here. He was so absorbed in his work that he never noticed that she began to cough as she stood there clad so scantily. And in her patience—her wish to serve and help him—she never disclosed that she

was ill and suffering. But one day she came toward him with uncertain steps, and stumbling fell at his feet. 'Papa—I am ill—I am tired. My side hurts.' He caught her in his arms; she was shivering, but the touch of her hands scorched him. She was not ill very long—two or three days, perhaps; pneumonia set in. Her grave is in the cemetery at Azeba. I have never seen her father since. He went back to Tunis, leaving the statue. He has never returned."

Frances's eyes filled with sympathetic tears. So there had been no holding back from death this child so beautiful, so beloved. And in an agony of remorse and grief the poor father—purblind fool that he had been—had left the dilapidated house by the marble quarries at El-Garah, and had gone back to Tunis—to the dull routine of work, to the shaping of the marble dreams of other men.

She thought, as she looked at that little, stained, unfinished, yet wholly beautiful statue, how impossible it would have been for him to come back to El-Garah, and look upon the marble presentment of his dead child, so full of grace and charm, so instinct with life. She felt, too, that she could never forget the first impression made upon her by that childish form, swift, eager, full of careless life, and now left in tragic solitude, abandoned for ever by the man who dared dream no more. And here were the little feet poised as if running—the little feet that now could never, never reach his side, running swiftly, too, as if she were growing impatient at being

left so long alone in the darkness of the disused studio.

Instinctively she put out her hand and touched the silken locks of Josette.

Josette, temporarily saddened by the recital of this story, to which she had listened attentively, said:

"That little girl would have perhaps been the same age as myself?"

Frances did not answer for the moment.

"That little girl of the pretty statue?" pursued Josette insistently.

"She was younger than you, Josette," said Jean; "she could not have been more than seven or eight."

"But she was a good little girl?" inquired Josette. "Did you not say she was quiet and obedient, and kept very still, so that this statue might be made?"

Jean assented.

"Ah, then, there is no need to pity her. She is with the good God now, is she not?"

Seizing David by the arm, she dragged him triumphantly toward the garden, and Jean and Frances were left alone. The overseer's wife had vanished to prepare breakfast for the little party.

"This has frightened you perhaps?" he said quietly.

How quickly he always understood; he seemed as sensitively intuitive as a woman.

"A little," she confessed. "It all seems to have been so sudden."

He said only: "Death often comes like that in

Africa, madame. But you have done all you can. If it does not succeed you will have at least the consolation of this knowledge."

"Josette is much stronger," she said; "she weighs more—she is getting quite fat!"

CHAPTER XXIV

WHILE they were having breakfast the overseer's wife informed them that an Arab child was lying ill in one of the gourbis beyond the quarries; her father had sent down word that he would be glad if they could go up and see her.

"It is a steep climb—do you think you can manage it?" Jean asked her. "If not, I will go with David. But I don't think I shall be allowed to go into the gourbi, so it would be more use if you could come. Which of the children is it?" he asked the woman.

"It is the second little girl, Kadouijah, M. le Comte," she answered.

"Oh, I think we shall all be able to go—we shall enjoy the walk, and David loves the forest, don't you, David?" said Frances.

As they passed through the narrow paths of the forest, gleaming with the shining quartz and broken fragments of marble, they could see that the recent rains had endowed it with a fresh and beautiful verdure. They crossed the Blue River—much wider here than it was at Frances's home. The bridge, too, was a massive iron one, capable of supporting the truck-loads of marble brought down by mules and bullocks from the quarries above. They passed a picturesque group of Tuscan charcoal-burners, and the aromatic whiff

of olive smoke greeted them like a pungent incense. It reminded Frances with a sharp pang of the days of her journeying in Italy with Aubrey. She seemed to be walking with him in the olive groves on the hills outside Florence, looking down on the beautiful city arising from its pale mirage of delicate silver mist. She could see again the slim and gracious towers, disposed with such absolute perfection, the massively beautiful cupola flashing like a red cornelian, with the fragile loveliness of Giotto's tower standing beside it, and looking as if it were carved out of palest ivory. She could see the Arno, now gold, now crimson, now jade-colored, winding seaward across the green valley, and its deep emerald and opal hues as it lapped the old bridges of the city. The olive woods, the thin scrub of myrtle and arbutus, the ilex and cypress trees, the coloring of the mountains at once rich and delicate, transported her back to that other journey when Aubrey had been at her side, filling her with his own eager enthusiasm. At that moment she almost resented Jean's presence, as if it had been an intrusion upon these memories. To-day she could feel thankful that he had adopted this deferential and subservient attitude toward her, and that his chief care was always for the prosperity of Oued Zerqa. It was part of his duty to take her to see her tenants, especially if they were ill or in need. It was a matter of formality, and even if her visit could not help the little Arab girl, she had, at any rate, done what was required of her.

David and Josette went on in front, sometimes

running and sometimes walking; she could hear the sound of their chattering and laughter. She felt half amused at the thought that to a casual spectator they must have looked like an ordinary family party, a father and mother and two children taking a walk in the forest!

More than once they crossed the Blue River in its tortuous windings through the deep ravines of the forest. It was a place so full of mystery that it seemed to her as if it must have been inhabited for many centuries by the strange, half-human creatures of mythology. Fauns and dryads were surely concealed in these ancient trees, and a distant *gezbah* sounded like a veritable pipe of Pan echoing strains of wistful, seductive, unearthly music, with even a hint of evil sounding through its plaintive melody. Here at night, when darkness enfolded the forest with yet deeper shadows, wild beasts emerged from their lairs and roamed at will, allaying their thirst in the waters of the Blue River. The sharp bark of the jackal, the low, menacing purr of the panther, the shrill and horrible laugh of the hyena could be heard awakening the midnight echoes there.

They came suddenly upon a clearing where a group of brown *gourbis*, made of dark-colored mud, and thatched with boughs of brushwood, made a succession of blots on the green hillside. They were long and low, with an opening at one end, which was the only aperture, and through which chickens and calves and goats strayed as they pleased. Some children were playing outside, the girls wearing bright-colored head-

dresses and long robes of red and blue cotton fastened with a silver fibula, the skirt nearly touching their bare brown ankles; the boys, active and hardy, with a shabby red fez on their heads, and a worn gray *haik* fastened round their shoulders.

On seeing the little party approach they stopped playing and came forward awkwardly, fixing great, shy, dark eyes upon Frances. A tall Arab emerged from the gourbi, and accompanied by his mother, an aged, withered crone, came up and spoke in voluble Arabic to Jean, who replied in the same language. Other women came out from the surrounding huts, and all regarded Frances with a shy curiosity. One, bolder and more impulsive than the others, came right up to her and, putting her arms round her neck, kissed her with wistful affection. She was a slim, beautiful, dark-eyed girl, and wore a loose robe of some dark blue cotton stuff, the short sleeves displaying under ones of pale pink; her head-dress, too, was pink, with a band of yellow. Her earrings were enormous—great silver hoops almost as large as the bangles that encircled her slim wrists—and they were fastened to her head-dress by means of little silver chains. She fixed her eyes with longing envy at the little diamond brooch which fastened the lace at Frances's throat. The *khal-khal* on her brown ankles jingled as she moved. She had all the unconscious grace of the young Arab woman, whether she be princess or peasant.

A long discussion ensued in Arabic, and Jean interpolated from time to time an abrupt sen-

tence. Presently he turned to Frances and said:

"This little girl, Kadouijah, is very ill, and they want David to go and put his hand on her. They call him the Boy Marabout, and believe that he possesses miraculous gifts."

David did not hear this speech, for he had moved away with Josette to watch the children, who had now resumed their games.

"I am afraid it will not be of any use," said Frances. "Do tell them we do not think he has any power to heal."

Jean repeated this in Arabic to the assembled Arabs. The young woman shook her head. "We know that Allah has given him wonderful gifts. The birds of the forest sit on his hands and sing—only a marabout could make them do that. I am quite sure that the touch of his hand will relieve Kadouijah."

"David, come here. I have something to say to you," said Frances.

She explained the situation briefly to him. "But, mother—I can do no good," he said. "Why do they want me to touch her?"

"You know the Arabs are very superstitious, David—any one who does anything at all wonderful is called a marabout. And it seems they have seen you with the birds."

"I think, David," said Jean, "that it will be better to do as they ask. We have told them we do not think it will be of any use."

"I will say my rosary for her recovery," he said.

The old woman led the way into the gourbi. Frances and David and little Josette followed

immediately behind her, and the rest of the Arabs and children brought up the rear. Jean remained outside. The strange, dark dwelling was suffocatingly stuffy and airless, owing to the absence of windows, but it was large and spacious. There was no floor, for it had been built in the simplest manner on the bare ground, which had not even been leveled or smoothed, so that depressions and mounds showed themselves everywhere. Calves and chickens and dogs strayed in and out. A fire of brushwood burned at one end near the solitary aperture, and added to the heat of the place. Above it hung, gypsy-wise, a big, black pot, wherein the *cous-cous* was being prepared, and the odor of cooking mingled with the pungent smoke, and filled the gourbi with a thick and heavy atmosphere. It was a practical picture of the simple life, wherein all needs were reduced to a minimum. Food, shelter, fire, and clothing were the essentials demanded to protect and sustain life, and they were here supplied in the most absolutely primitive fashion. If there had only been a window to admit the cool, sweet air of the forest, with its soft, aromatic scents, its reviving freshness!

Frances did not at first become accustomed to the obscurity, which was rendered deeper by the whiffs of smoke from the fire and the thick steam ascending from the *cous-cous*. But as she moved forward, groping her way across the uneven surface of the ground, she was at last able to discern the form of a child lying on a mat, her red robe covered only with a dark-colored *haik*. At first she thought it was only a bundle of rags lying

there, but as she approached the heap moved a little, and a girl rose to her feet with some difficulty, and stumbled weakly toward her. Frances supported her in her arms and laid her gently down on the mat. The little hands were burning hot and dry to the touch; even through her glove Frances could feel the consuming fever that was sapping the child's very life. She was in reality far too ill to stand up, but her innate courtesy and forgetfulness of self had constrained her to rise and greet the Roumi lady who had come to visit her. Frances was touched to the quick by this effort, made so spontaneously and graciously.

"She has an attack of fever, madame," said the old woman in broken French. It was like this every day. Kadouijah had been ill for some weeks, and every afternoon with fiendish regularity the fever assailed her, and held her for a few painful hours in its merciless grip. She could not be much older than Josette, but she was pitifully shrunken and thin; Frances had felt for a moment as if she had clasped a skeleton form in her arms when she laid her down tenderly on the mat. A dry little cough echoed through that place of gloomy darkness.

Frances wondered what nostrums they had given her, knowing from experience how difficult it was to make an Arab use anything but native remedies. She wished she could have taken her back to Oued Zerqa, and given her the benefit of fresh air and sunshine, as well as nourishing food. There were tears in her eyes as she bent over the fragile little form lying upon the mat

on that hard earth, with no pillow for her head, while her feeble cough echoed plaintively through the gourbi, and the fever daily devoured her ebbing strength.

The old woman seized David's hand and held it against Kadouijah's forehead, muttering words of which he could not guess the meaning, but they sounded monotonous, like an incantation. He drew his rosary from his pocket and began to recite it quickly in Latin, as he knelt beside the sick girl. It was a strange little scene; the dark gourbi, the red glow of the fire investing it with a certain Rembrandtesque effect, the girl lying there quite still with closed eyes, with David kneeling near, reciting his rosary. When it was finished he rose and put his hand on hers. "Good-by, Kadouijah," he said. He followed his mother out of the gourbi into the fresh air.

Frances went up to Jean. "I wish I could take her back with me and nurse her," she said.

Jean repeated this remark to the father of the child. He smiled and shook his head.

"Kadouijah is carefully tended—she has all she needs."

All she needs? A mat—the hard ground on which to rest that suffering, wasted, skeleton body; a daily portion of *cous-cous*, a sup of goat's milk, and the forlorn shelter of that dark and airless gourbi!

It was time to start homeward, for already the afternoon was late. They walked back in silence to El-Garah, past the marble quarries, lying like a pale scar on the hillside, through the emerald

groves, flushed here and there with the opening asphodels. Soon they were driving through the forest on their way back to Oued Zerqa.

Frances said at last: "She will die, poor little soul. And they won't care at all!"

"No, they will not care, since she is a girl. They will say *Mektoub*—it is written—it is the will of Allah. Be comforted, madame—Kadouijah will escape the bitter tragic lot, worse than that of a slave, of the Arab woman!"

For it is a point of honor among the Arabs to show no pity and offer no consolation to their womenkind, no matter how acute may be their sufferings. Frances knew this, and knew, too, how hard they worked, fetching water and fuel, grinding their wheat by hand, and pounding it for the *cous-cous*, toiling early and late at hard manual tasks, receiving no praise for their work if it were well done, and harsh and cruel blows if it were not.

And little Kadouijah must die thus without prayers, without consolation of religion. Frances wished that she could teach her the holy mysteries of the Catholic faith, and baptize this child born under the cruel and barbarous rule of the Crescent, so that she might learn the better way of the Cross, softened through all its bitterness by the Divine joys of faith and hope and love.

Going home they seemed to drive straight toward the sunset. The western sky was filled with liquid gold like a wide sea, and against this pageant of pure and lovely color, clear, luminous, translucent, the Needle Mountain stood up with

its slender amethyst spire sharply silhouetted, watching like a guardian over Azeba and the long plain of the Blue River. As the glow faded, one white star pricked the sky, a solitary lamp of quivering radiance.

Hafsi came out to greet them as they drove up to the house, and lifted down the little Josette, who had been lying asleep with Frances's arms around her.

That evening, when David had gone to bed and she was sitting alone in her study writing, Hafsi knocked at the door.

"Madame," he said, "the father of Kadouijah has ridden over from the forest near El-Garah."

"Yes?" said Frances. "Does he want anything? Shall I give him some quinine for Kadouijah?"

Hafsi hesitated.

"He does not wish to disturb you, madame—but he wishes to thank you and M. David."

"I will go and see him," said Frances, rising.

She went out into the hall, and found the Arab standing there like a bronze statue, his face set and immovable under the white folds of his turban.

In broken French he assured her that Kadouijah had arisen perfectly cured less than an hour after M. David, the Boy Marabout, had touched her with his hand. "We felt quite sure that he would cure her, madame," he said, "and I wished to lose no time in coming to thank you, and I am now going to thank M. le Comte for bringing you to see her. *Slama, madame.*"

"Slama," said Frances.

The Arab gave a deep bow and passed out of the door into the night.

And Frances stood there as one half hypnotized. The mysteries, the deep secrets of Africa, seemed to be encompassing her against her will. She felt afraid.

CHAPTER XXV

APRIL had come—the month when spring seems to dance across the Tell, and surely to no place in the world can she be so lavish of her flower gifts. Every little white cottage in Azeba was garlanded with delicate, frail clusters of mauve wistaria, hanging its drooping, pendent bunches to be the day-long haunt of the busy honey-bees. Every little garden was filled with early pink roses and waxen-white arum lilies, their long-stemmed chalices springing up from the miniature groves of broad, glossy leaves. In the forest around Oued Zerqa the glades were full of white bush-heath, of blossoming myrtle and gorse, and wide stretches of asphodel. Wild irises made patches of blue, and the centaury carpeted the banks everywhere with its thickly growing masses of deep, rose-colored blossoms. The acacia and ash trees that made a shady avenue along the road to Azeba were tenderly green with the soft, plume-like foliage of the south. The air was filled with the persistent scent of orange and citron blossom, and the mimosa hung out its golden tassels to smile back at the sun.

Jean was at work in his study. Through the open window the faintly stirring wind of late afternoon floated lazily, bringing with it a scent

of roses and orange-blossom, and the thousand perfumes of the forest. Outside the groves of wild olive trees were shining with the hard brilliance of polished silver in the sunlight.

A knock at the door disturbed him. "Come in," he said rather impatiently, for he was revising an article on Timgad for a French review; it was to form in the future part of his book on Roman Africa.

Hafsi entered the room.

"Pardon, M. de Comte."

"Dost thou wish to speak to me, Hafsi? I am very busy this afternoon."

"M. le Comte, I came to tell thee—to warn thee——"

Jean sprang quickly to his feet. "Has anything happened at Oued Zerqa?"

"No, no, M. le Comte. All is well at Oued Zerqa. But it is about M. David that I would speak to thee!"

"Well?" he said, looking relieved, "and what of M. David, Hafsi?"

"People are beginning to talk very much of M. David in Azeba," said Hafsi; "everywhere—in the Cafés Maures—in the bazaars——"

"And what are they saying?"

"They say he is a marabout, M. le Comte."

"Oh, but they have called him the Boy Marabout for a long time."

"But it is since he cured the little Kadouijah that his fame has spread—even in Constantine, and in Biskra, and in Bône they speak of him and his power——"

Jean laughed.

"Well, don't let them duck him in the pond at Azeba next time they want rain! It might give him a chill!"

The reigning marabout of Azeba, a drunken negro, had recently suffered this discomfiting experience on several occasions, the Arabs superstitiously believing that to immerse a marabout will end a prolonged drought. And the weather had been perfectly dry and rainless for some weeks past. Jean had heard the voices of the Arab children praying for rain in the vineyards; the low, monotonous chanting had reached his ears as he sat at work.

"They will not put M. David in the water, M. le Comte," said Hafsi; "I am not afraid of that."

"Then what dost thou fear?" asked Jean de Vernay.

The Arab hesitated. His manner was reserved and secretive; he wished to warn Jean without making a definite statement. And Jean knew that he was perhaps to come in contact with one of those mysterious revelations which from time to time had reluctantly lifted the veil a little from those impenetrable and closely guarded secrets that enfold Islam against the curious gaze of all the world—the secrets a Christian could never know nor even approach; the secrets that are faithfully kept, and of which the closed doors of the mosques, the veiled faces of the women, may be regarded as symbolic.

Jean had a vague horror of these things. He disliked to be surrounded by them, to feel their nebulous, sinister presence. The Cross had been uplifted in Africa, serenely conquering—to him

the Crescent was almost an emblem of Satan, the standard of an evil camp. But its power was strong because it was secret, sinister, unapproachable, and impenetrable.

"M. le Comte knows that it is not wise in this country for a—Christian—to bear such a reputation. He might pervert the sons of the Prophet and teach deceit to the faithful. Or——" And now he fixed his black, fatalistic eyes attentively upon Jean's face.

"Or?" said Jean.

"They might wish to convert M. David—to make a good Mussulman of him—his gifts would be of great value!"

"Oh, there is not the slightest chance of their being able to do that!" said Jean. "M. David is a very good Catholic, Hafsi; he would, I am sure, die for his faith, if it were necessary."

"But madame—would grieve if he were to die," said Hafsi; "he is her first-born, her only son."

"And what gifts has he shown beyond this so-called cure of Kadouijah?" inquired Jean rather impatiently. The whole thing was manifestly absurd, and he tried to conquer the indefinable feeling of fear with which the Arab's words had imbued him.

"M. le Comte, the wild things of the forest obey M. David. Never has there been a marabout in Azeba who could perform such miracles! The animals follow him—the birds will perch upon his hands and sing. He has gifts and powers denied to other men. He is a marabout, and it is not safe that he should be here!"

"Hafsi—thou dost not know of any plot against him?"

The Arab shook his head. "I know nothing, M. le Comte. But M. le Comte knows that in this country people will talk much of such things. From the market-place of Azeba the Arabs go to Guelma, to Philippeville, to Bône, and Constantine, and from thence the news travels quickly to Biskra and Tougourt, Laghouat, and even to Tunis. They speak in the cafés and bazaars of all these places of the Boy Marabout at the Blue River!"

"Hafsi," said Jean, laying down his pen and looking the Arab squarely in the face, "thou wast for many years in the service of madame's father—the grandfather of M. David?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte—for five years or more. I was with him when he died."

"And thou art contented and happy now in the service of madame, is it not so?"

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte. Madame's goodness is well known. The Arabs call her Oum-el-kheir—the mother of good," said Hafsi.

"Then because thou art such an old servant—such a faithful friend to madame and her family—canst thou not tell me what there is to fear for M. David?"

"I can not say more than I have already said, Monsieur le Comte. I have told monsieur everything that I can tell him!"

Jean knew that his hands were beating ineffectually against the locked doors of Islam.

"If Monsieur le Comte will come with me into

the forest now, I will show him something. If monsieur will step very quietly——”

Jean rose with a sigh. Tingad must be abandoned, as lately it had had so often to be abandoned. Since Frances's coming he had neglected his book, although he assured himself frequently that her living at Oued Zerqa had made no difference to him. He followed Hafsi into the garden and down the path which led into the forest. The way down to the river was steep, and they passed the hot streams for which Aïn-Safra was famous. The rocks were clad with a profusion of oleander bushes, of maidenhair fern, while banana and date-palms made avenues of shade.

Beyond the river the glades were beautiful, clothed thickly with the golden garlands of broom, while the asphodels flushed whole spaces with a mist of fragile pink. They passed through groves of cork trees, their stripped stems warmed to crimson in the sunlight, their leaves turning yellow, as if it had been autumn. They left on the right the little *auberge* of the Fontaines Chaudes, with its somewhat primitive installation of baths, where the Judas trees were gay with their bright purple-pink blossoms. They continued to follow a narrow path between hedges of arbutus and myrtle, till they came suddenly upon an open space. Hafsi stopped, and beckoned to Jean, who heard across the deep silences of the forest the low, thrilling flute-notes of a nightingale.

Sitting on the stump of an old tree was David. His back was turned to them, and the sun drib-

bled through the foliage upon his uncovered dark hair. He was leaning forward a little, and on his hand was perched a nightingale, and it was this bird which was pouring forth a song almost unearthly in its sweetness. In Algeria the nightingales often begin to sing at four o'clock in the afternoon, and can be heard until quite late at night.

The boy sat there, immovable as a statue. But every now and then in the pauses of the song he would clasp the bird against his breast with a gesture of tenderness. Then releasing him gently he would hold out his hand, and the nightingale would perch again upon the flat, extended palm. The song continued—the long, sweet-drawn notes, the fragment of consecutive melody piercingly sweet, the familiar jug-jug sound—each cadence, each motif, were faithfully repeated. The bird seemed tireless.

Jean and Hafsi crept away down the path shadowed by arbutus and cork and olive, out into the glade, golden with sunshine and fragrant with the perfume of the broom that here seemed to acquire an almost passionate glory. They went back to the bridge that spanned the Blue River.

Then Hafsi spoke.

"Did I not say well, M. le Comte? The child is a marabout."

"I had heard rumors about him," said Jean, "and they were so anxious he should touch little Kadouijah. Does madame know of this, Hafsi?"

"M. le Comte—his mother has seen him. She knows that he possesses these gifts. If she would only take him back to England!"

"I do not think madame has any intention of leaving Oued Zerqa," said Jean. He waited a moment. "Is the door still open all night, Hafsi?" he asked.

"Yes, Monsieur le Comte—it is open all night. That is her wish."

CHAPTER XXVI

THAT same evening he resolved to go and see Frances. He had not seen her for some time, and he gathered up the sheets of paper on which he was writing his chapter on Timgad, in order to take them with him and show them to her. He wished to make some excuse for disturbing her. Lately he had gone back so completely to his old hermit's life at Aïn-Safra that he had been almost able to forget her presence at Oued Zerqa. They had been for no more expeditions together since the day when they had all gone over to the marble quarries of El-Garah. But Hafsi's conversation had disturbed Jean. He thought the time had now come for him to give some hint to Frances. Since she was aware of her son's peculiar gifts, it might be well for her to know that they constituted a danger; that the attitude of the natives toward him was a strange one, not unmingled with superstition, and that their gossip about him had spread far and wide.

She was sitting alone; he generally found her alone after dinner. The evenings were still chilly, and she sat near a blazing fire of heath-roots, reading; her book shielded her face from the flames. She wore white, and the loose sleeves of her tea-gown hung away from her arms and

wrists. He thought he had never seen such fragile-looking hands, so thin, so white.

"You have not been here for a long time, M. de Vernay," she said.

"No," he said. "I have been busy. I have brought you some of the results of my labors; perhaps you will have the patience to read it, or at least allow me to read it to you," he added.

"Won't you read it to me?" said Frances, taking up her work.

When he had finished reading she looked up.

"I am glad you are working again at your book," she said. "Madame de Vernay told me about it when I was at Biskra. But you never mentioned it."

"I did not think it would interest you," he answered.

"Oh, but it interests me very much," she said quickly. "I liked what you read to me just now. When are you going to publish it?"

"This chapter is to be published in a French review very soon—I have published some isolated chapters in this way."

"But the book—will not that be ready soon?"

"It means a great deal of study, and research, and—traveling," he said slowly.

"You mean you must go to the places?"

"Yes, madame. Especially in Tunisia. The journey is long, and so far I have not found time."

"Do you not want to go now? Before the hot weather sets in? April and May are very pleasant months in Tunis, I have been told."

His face was grave and set in harsh lines.

"I can not leave Oued Zerqa now," he said.

"Why? Is it such an important time here? Can't the people you employ look after things here while you are away?"

"That is not my reason, although I do not care to leave Oued Zerqa in the spring."

"But if—if I ask you to take this holiday, M. de Vernay?"

"I am afraid it would be impossible for me to do so now," he answered.

"You won't tell me the reason?" Frances laid aside her work and looked at him attentively.

"I do not wish to tell you."

"Is it because I am here, and you do not think we should be safe here—unless you remain close at hand?" she asked a little insistently.

A dull red came over his face.

"Africa is not so safe for a woman alone—as London, for instance," he said. "You were not thinking of going home for the summer, were you, madame?"

"Oh, no," said Frances. "I have quite made up my mind not to return to England. I—I think I shall make my home here. I could not bear the thought of leaving it!"

"So you like it?" he said curiously. "It is, nevertheless, a very dull place for a woman— young and able to enjoy life."

"Shall I tell you something, M. de Vernay? I do not wish to hurt your feelings, but I think I had better tell you the truth."

"Yes, madame?" His face hardened, his whole form seemed to stiffen.

She found it difficult to speak, in the face of that harsh rigidity.

"I have found peace here, and I am very happy, in this quiet life with the children. But there is one thing that is spoiling it a little for me."

"And that is?"

"It is the feeling you have given me that I am an intruder," she said. Her face looked flushed in the firelight; her eyes shone like stars. "I wish you would come and go exactly as if I were not here. You cannot possibly remain here all the time, working yourself to death, just because we are living here. You make me feel unkind and selfish, and as if I had no right to be here! Please take a holiday, and travel and see these places that will help you with your book. Your researches, as well as your health, render it necessary."

"It is impossible," said de Vernay stubbornly. "While I am here, I intend to do what I conceive to be my duty. If it does not please you, the remedy lies in your own hands. I am your servant, to be dismissed at your will!"

Across the humility of the words she detected a tone of almost arrogant defiance. She saw the flash in his eyes, darkened by anger; his lips were sternly set. She remembered Hafsî's words: "The Arabs are afraid, so they obey." At that moment she felt a little thrill of fear, as of one who comes unexpectedly upon the very edge of a yawning precipice.

"Please do not look upon me as such a harsh tyrant," she said gently. "I do not know what

Oued Zerqa would do without you. But don't let it eat up all these years of your life!"

His face relaxed. "I, too, am very happy at Oued Zerqa. It would hurt me to leave it."

"And it would hurt me to leave it and go back to London," said Frances. "This seems to be my only place in the world—the only place where I have a right to be."

With an effort Jean said:

"Pardon me for asking, madame—but you have had no news of your husband?"

"None," said Frances. Her voice broke a little. "There is no hope—no hope of my hearing——"

"You have written?"

"I cannot write. I do not know where he is."

After these months of silence it was almost a relief to speak of Aubrey.

"I do not know if he is dead or alive!"

"I have prayed," said Jean, "that he might come. You have always my poor prayers."

"I am glad you remember sometimes to pray for me," she said.

"Sometimes? But always, madame."

She said: "Perhaps some day when I least expect him—he will walk in. He knows that I meant to come here—it was his wish."

"I think, if I were you," said Jean, suddenly remembering the object of his visit, "that I should not encourage David to go so much alone in the forest. I saw him to-day quite a long way off—considerably beyond Aïn-Safra. He is young—and the Arabs——" He stopped.

"They would not harm him?" said Frances

quickly. She had the mother's sixth sense to discern the remotest danger threatening her offspring. "Are you afraid of anything? Have you heard anything?"

"Madame, have I not just told you? Africa is not such a safe place as London. One must be on one's guard. There is a saying among the French, 'One must beware of the Arabs'; I—I commend it to your notice."

"But David—they like David—ever since he touched Kadouijah and she got better, he has often been asked into the Arab huts to touch sick people. They call him the Boy Marabout."

Jean told her the story of the nightingale; he did not like to alarm her too much by relating his conversation with Hafsi.

"Oh," she said, "I have often wished he were more like other boys. I have even wished he were not so good, because then he would seem more normal. But, as it is, I must leave him in the hands of God. David has learned how to conform to His will—you can see that in his daily life. The priest says the same thing. I can only watch and pray——"

When he got up to go away she went to the window and looked out with great mournful eyes upon the plain of Azeba, lying asleep in the moonlight, under the stars. The sky was like a velvet canopy hung with millions of lamps. She could distinguish the outlines of the mountains, gray, indeterminate shapes, vigilant, remote.

Then she crept up to David's room and stole in so as not to disturb him. He was lying asleep,

his hands were clasped upon his breast, as if he had fallen asleep while still praying. By his side, on a little table, she saw a book—the “Imitation”—and his rosary. The window of his room was open, and from below in the road she could hear the faint sound of Arab music. A voice flung out a scrap of song to the stars. A vague uneasiness possessed Frances. Jean had said that people were less safe here than in London. Some indefinable, nebulous danger menaced David; he was not safe here; his gifts had attracted attention, and she felt quite sure that it was to warn her of possible danger that Jean had come to see her this evening. Jean had wanted her to take the boy back to England. But there was Aubrey to be considered—Aubrey, the outcast, the wanderer, the fugitive, who one day, deeming himself safe, might seek her here in the solitudes of the Blue River. He must not be disappointed when he came; he must find her here. Yes, at any cost he must find her here. She must remain on his account. He must not find a darkened, empty house when he came, confidently expecting welcome and love. She must not fail Aubrey.

CHAPTER XXVII

JEAN was riding toward Azeba a few days later when he saw the figure of a woman approaching him on foot through the forest. This unusual sight constrained him to pull up his horse and wait until she had passed. Her face was hidden under a very broad-brimmed straw hat, but one lock of ashen-blond hair had escaped and hung in a loose glossy curl over her shoulder.

"It cannot be Alix!" he said aloud.

But the next moment she had come up to him and lifted her face, and he saw that it was indeed Alix Rezanoff.

"Good morning, Jean. You are out early. What a nice day and how sweet the forest smells! I almost like it in summer."

She evinced no surprise at seeing him, but rather greeted him as if they were in the habit of meeting frequently. But Jean looked at her in undisguised astonishment.

"My dear Alix—what in the world are you doing here?"

"I am on my way to Oued Zerqa to stay with your pretty little cousin, Madame Amory," she said in her soft Russian French.

"My cousin expects you?" he inquired.

"Oh, no! I never make appointments, and if

I do I never keep them. I go in the opposite direction when the day comes. Do you like my dress? I had it made on purpose in Constantine. See! One feels so droll in a long skirt again!"

Jean regarded the trim white coat and skirt, the soft lace blouse with evident approval.

"But you look charming, Alix," he said.

"Do you think Madame Amory will be pleased to see me?"

"I am sure she will. Still, it would have been more—more conventional to have written preparing her, would it not?"

"I cannot be conventional. If she does not want me I will go away again. How is Paul?"

"I haven't heard from him for ages. But I fancy he has gone back to France."

"I have heard from him once or twice," said Alix. "Since his accident he has become very morbid—at least, his letters are very morbid. He says, too, that he continually feels as if he were falling from some tremendous height into a bottomless abyss." She changed the subject with her usual abruptness. "Have you seen Madame Amory lately?"

"I saw her—a few days ago," said Jean.

"I suppose you see her very often?" she asked curiously.

"Not very often."

"You need not be so afraid," said Alix; "she is a little Snow-Woman. If you touched her you would be frozen—like the man in the fairy tale!"

Jean made no answer.

"Her husband has not returned to her?" said Alix.

"He has not returned."

"And the little boy? Is it true—all this gossip about him?"

"What gossip have you heard, Alix?"

"I have heard all the Arabs say about him—that he is a marabout, endowed with all kinds of wonderful gifts. That he goes in and out of the gourbis curing sick people. That the birds and beasts of the forest are tame in his presence. That it is known he prays himself into a state of unconsciousness—of ecstasy. I did not see him in Biskra. What is he like, Jean?"

"He is a little like his mother—he resembles the de Vernays. Do the Arabs really talk about him much, Alix?"

"A good deal," she said carelessly. "I myself have heard talk of this kind in the bazaars of Biskra—of Sidi-Okba—of Tougourt—even in some of the douars. I have just come from Tougourt with a caravan that escorted me as far as Biskra. But I must not detain you. I must go and inform my hostess that I have come to stay with her."

"You must follow that road—it leads straight to Oued Zerqa," said Jean, pointing with his whip to the road that lay below gleaming in the sunlight.

"Come up and see us soon, Jean," she said; "I expect Madame Amory will bore me a little. But I am anxious to see her son. I shall look to you to amuse me. Bring a horse for me to ride."

She turned abruptly and went down the narrow path that led into the road. She seemed to

him to be surrounded by a mist of gold and green, a delicate background formed of fresh spring leaves and blossoming gorse. Her slight figure in its white dress was soon lost to sight behind the great hedges of Barbary fig trees with their uncouth grotesque foliage.

Alix walked up to the house and into the veranda, where Frances was sitting with David. They were having their morning coffee. Josette had finished hers and was playing in the garden near the fountain.

"How do you do?" said Alix, holding out her hand. "I have come at last. I have just met Jean—he seemed to think I ought to have written to you first!"

"Come in," said Frances; "I am delighted to see you. This is my little son—I don't think you have seen him before."

David rose, and taking Alix's proffered hand kissed it.

"Madame, is it thus you always receive the unexpected guest? You just say, 'Come in'—as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world? Not every one in Algeria would welcome me thus or give me shelter. They would say, 'Alix can sleep on the ground under her own tent!'"

She sat down opposite Frances in a big wicker chair, filled with large cushions. Frances poured out some coffee and gave it to her. David handed her rolls and butter and honey. She began to eat with evident hunger.

"How charming this place is! Your roses are beautiful, madame!"

She leaned a little forward and pulled some half-opened blooms of Paul Néron toward her, gathered some of them, and fastened them in the lace of her blouse.

"They are coming on well," said Frances.

"In the desert one misses flowers. And the flowers of the oasis, though they are lovely, fade so quickly—almost as soon as they are gathered."

"Have you come from the desert now?" asked Frances.

"Yes. I was at Tougourt, and I joined a caravan leaving for Biskra. We were five or six days on the way. But the weather was perfect."

Frances rang a little handbell, in response to which Hafsi appeared.

"Hafsi, Madame Rezanoff has come to stay with me. Please see that the room next to mine is prepared for her."

"Yes, madame," said Hafsi.

He withdrew as silently as he had come.

"I have another guest—perhaps M. de Vernay told you? Little Josette de Méryville is spending some time with us."

"I knew the de Méryvilles at one time," said Alix; "this is their only child, is it not? It was born the same day as mine."

Into her face there came the curious passionate melancholy that was almost more racial than individual. Her gray eyes grew somber and dark under the thin, black line of her eyebrows. She pushed back her hat and Frances saw that her hair was heavy and blond—that peculiar shade of ashen fairness which sometimes accompanies dark gray eyes; it had no gold threads in

it, yet it possessed a strange warmth. She wore it parted low on her brow to hide the scar of the Arab's saber. Her small, narrow and colorless face seemed to be lit only by the brilliant sad eyes that looked like veritable windows of the soul, so complex, so defiant they were, and at once young and weary.

"She must be nearly ten, is she not? How time goes!—but I have not forgotten the mad joy of the moment when I first held my son in my arms nearly ten years ago."

Frances looked at David, who had risen and gone to fetch Josette to greet the newcomer.

"Nor I," she said quietly.

"Did you wish for it? I never wished for it," said Alix carelessly.

"I think I wished for it more than anything," said Frances, her eyes still fastened upon David.

"I lived only for my child until he died," said Alix in a hard, bitter voice. "With him I buried all that there was of love in my heart. I resolved never to love anything again. That is six years ago, and I have kept my resolution."

She rose and leaned over the wooden rail of the veranda, looking toward the golden plain, fresh and fertile after the recent rains, and at the long range of purple mountains under that serene and cloudless sapphire sky.

"Here is Josette," said David, coming toward her and holding the little girl by the hand.

"Josette, dear, go and kiss Madame Rezanoff. She used to know your mother, and has perhaps even seen you when you were quite a little baby," said Frances.

Josette gazed at her with the frank undisguised admiration of childhood.

"I shall love you," she said quaintly, "because you knew my dear mamma. And because you are beautiful—very beautiful."

A look of amusement came into Alix's eyes that had been so sad as they first rested on this child, born the same day as her little dead son.

"Oh, I am not beautiful now," she said; "I am an old woman, Josette, but you are very nice to say such flattering things to me!"

And she touched the child's fair curls with her small hands.

Josette nestled close to her. "Are you going to stay here?" she asked.

"Yes—for a little while."

"Where do you live?" asked the child.

"I have no home. I live generally in a tent. When I go into the desert the Arabs bring my tent for me to sleep under."

"Oh, I should like to go with you! It would be splendid!" cried Josette in delight.

"When you are older you must ask your mother's permission, Josette, and then perhaps you will be able to come with me!"

Josette clapped her hands. "Oh, I shall love that! David, do you hear?—I shall go and live in a tent with Madame Rezanoff! Don't you envy me?"

"Let me look at you," said Alix; "is one really as tall as that at ten years old? Already nearly as high as my shoulder?" She measured Josette's height against her own. Then with a sudden impulse she stooped and kissed the little, deli-

cate upturned face with a kind of wistful, passionate tenderness. "Well, I must go in now, if you will let me, and have a bath, and make myself presentable before luncheon. I think I will lie down for a little—I was up so early this morning."

Alix was sitting on a low divan near the window of Frances Amory's study. A big wood fire blazed on the hearth, and the olive logs gave forth a delicious aromatic odor. It was raining heavily, but Alix had opened the window, and the damp, scented air from the forest blew in softly, ruffling the waves of her thick blond hair. The steady falling of the rain, descending straight and heavily upon the thick-growing palms and orange trees, made a rhythmic pleasant sound as of running water.

"And you are never bored here?" she said, sipping the black coffee which Frances had just poured out and brought to her.

She liked to watch the movements of this tranquil Englishwoman with a kind of lazy attention. There was something very restful, very reposeful, about Frances with her slow gracious ways and absence of hurry, her little considered movements and gestures. She was so unruffled, so serene; she diffused an atmosphere of calm.

"No, I am never bored. With two children to look after there is always something to do. I have been teaching Josette, English and music—she makes progress. But sometimes it is a little lonely."

Alix craned her head out of the window, and

the rain fell in big, splashing drops on her face and uncovered hair.

"When one has lived in tents for so many years one can hardly endure the prison of four walls," she said as if apologizing for her action. "But your house is charming, Frances. I shall call you Frances, if you will let me. And this room is very pretty—it reminds me of many things. Of the life I used to know in Petersburg and Paris. I liked it then—but I couldn't go back to it now."

Frances said quietly: "I should like you to call me Frances. Since I came here there has been no one to call me by name. And I will call you Alix."

Alix smiled, then went on carelessly: "You don't seem to have succeeded in making friends with Jean de Vernay. Does he never come here? Don't you like him?"

"Oh, I like him," said Frances, "but he is too much occupied to come here very often. He writes his book in his spare time."

"Yes, he hasn't a thought beyond Oued Zerqa and his old Roman ruins," said Alix; "one Roman pavement is exactly like another, as far as I can see. They always bore me. I can remember when Jean was quite gay—even frivolous. That was before he lost his fortune. He is too much alone, and it makes him dull and serious!"

"You think he is too much alone? I wish he had more friends."

"He likes his hermit life," said Alix; "still, I thought you might have contrived to make him come out of his shell."

"He resents my being here," said Frances, with a touch of bitterness; "he insists upon behaving as if he were my servant, just because he is in charge of the property. He won't even treat me as an equal, much less as a cousin!"

"How like Jean!" said Alix; "that humility of his is really nothing but pride. Since he has worked for his living he has wished to be treated as a dependent. And all the time one knows that he is as proud as Lucifer. If you were really to find fault and make him feel a little humbled, it would be the best thing in the world for him! He would, however, find a strange pride in suffering this humiliation in silence!"

Frances said: "I only find fault with him for spending all his time and strength in my service. I don't want him to work so hard, so unremittingly. He knows it—I have told him—I begged him only the other day to take a holiday and go to Tunis and Kairouan—the places he wants to visit for his book, but he refuses to go away."

"I made sure that he would fall in love with you," said Alix; "I thought so when I saw you together in Biskra. But in this wilderness you must either love or hate, and you seem to have chosen the more prudent course of hating each other."

"You forget," said Frances, "that I am married." She spoke almost reprovingly.

"But I suppose that would hardly prevent Jean from falling in love with you," said Alix. "Nine out of ten men would have fallen in love with you under the circumstances, and you must

be thankful that he has so evidently been the tenth." She looked at Frances with narrowing eyes. "I had everything once. A husband whom I loved at first—as one loves when one is seventeen—and afterward hated as I never thought one could hate any one. A child whom I adored from the moment of his birth. They are both dead, and I have found the freedom I used to dream of here in Africa, where men and women can be free. Absolute, complete freedom, without chains or ties."

"And this satisfies you—this freedom?"

"I am content," she answered evasively. Frances listened half fascinated to her dreamy monologue, which she continued now without interruption. This woman held the place, the hour, under her spell. "I have set everything aside that stood in the way of my absolute freedom. Religion—yes, I was a Catholic, Frances; I was received just before my marriage. I was just seventeen, and I liked the fuss. You will laugh, but I assure you I was very devout. My husband was a Catholic, and his mother would not allow him to marry me until I had been received. She was what the French call a superior woman, tall, rigid, stern, every one was afraid of her; we obeyed her like children. Now I have lost my faith. I did not part with it quite so easily as with some other things. I began by being wilfully careless—and then it seemed to slip away. I tried never to think about it, but it took a little time to get over the superstitious feeling I had that one day I should be punished, very cruelly punished, eternally damned, eter-

nally parted from my boy. A White Father reasoned with me once when I was supposed to be dying from that saber-cut. I was so weak that I believe I did make some kind of—confession. But now I have not been to Mass nor to Confession for quite five years.”

She made the statement with a curious deadly calmness that sent a chilly feeling of fear through Mrs. Amory's frame. There was so much cold-bloodedness in the way she made this confidence; she displayed a child's insubordination—the reckless rebellion which a child will sometimes persevere in, even in the face of approaching punishment. There was less of unbelief than of actual deliberate mutiny against God, at once preconceived and malicious.

There is in the “Exercises of St. Ignatius” a meditation entitled the Two Camps, and which describes the choice given to each soul in regard to the standard under which it must decide to serve. The one camp promises much of trial, of bitter prolonged suffering, of deliberate renouncement and subdual of the flesh; it shows a narrow and straight path whereon its Leader and King walked once with pierced and bleeding Feet; it promises, too, an ultimate and eternal reward in a world to come. And the second camp holds out a wealth of happiness in the present, however illicitly and unlawfully obtained, and its leader, a Fallen Angel, knows well how to spread his nets with beautiful and alluring things to entice the feet of men. And it was this camp which Alix, in her desire for a paltry freedom, had joined with full knowledge.

"And it is in this state that you wish to die, Alix?" said Frances very sadly.

There was something tender and wistful in her voice; she yearned over this soul so bent on perishing.

"I don't think about death very often. When it comes I shall say *Mektoub*—the fate of every man is bound about his neck. One can't live, as I have done, under the Crescent without acquiring, at least, some of its fatalism!"

"But you are not ignorant—as the Arabs are ignorant."

Alix pushed the heavy hair back from her brow with a gesture of weariness.

"I am emancipated. I find myself now quite without fear." She looked steadily at Frances; her lips were set in a thin, scarlet line. "But you know, perhaps, that Paul de Vernay wishes to marry me—to make me go back to it all. Behind his love for me there exists a strong desire to save my soul—to snatch me from the burning." She laughed mirthlessly. "He thinks he can do this. There is something of the fanatic about Paul."

Frances put out a hand as if to restrain her. "Oh, Alix, why do you talk like this? It hurts and distresses me. I would help you to come back if I could. These things mean everything to me—without them life would be unbearable."

"You mustn't preach to me, Frances. It is no use. So many people have tried and failed. That excellent White Father, who seemed more like a saint than a man—Paul—Jean—they have all spoken—they all want to bring me back.

But I can't come—I must be free. However, I won't talk about it if it distresses you. How it rains to-night!" Again she went to the window and looked out into the heavy-scented darkness of the night. "It sounds like the tears of millions of weeping women—it makes me sad to listen to it. And how dark it is; the thick trees make it seem so much darker than it ever is in the desert. One can't see anything of the mountains—they are hidden behind the clouds. I think the forest is full of ghosts and djinns to-night, if they are not frightened away by those noisy jackals. One can't live in Africa without wondering if the Arabs have really any foundation for their belief in djinns. You, as a good Catholic, would say they are evil spirits pursuing weak and wayward souls to destroy them. How can you stay in these dark and gloomy forests?—their shadows are so terrifying. I should be frightened to go through them alone at night. In the desert I am never frightened—I love to have the great golden spaces of sand all around me, and the dunes spreading like waves with the wind blowing across them, and above me the wide sky filled with stars. I like to lie down on the warm sands, and sleep with no tent above my head, till the sun touches me and wakes me up. I could never go back to civilized ways again, but your room to-night made me think of the life I have left. I have been talking a great deal of nonsense, Frances, but sometimes it is a relief to talk to another woman. And you are very kind and sweet to listen so patiently, for I know you must disapprove of me."

She came across the room with her lazy, indolent movements. Frances rose and kissed the white, childish face.

"I am glad you have talked to me," said she gently.

She felt drawn to this strange little half-human being who had sought shelter under her roof.

"If I had been in your place, and suffered as I am sure you have done, I could not have settled down to this. I should have wanted something to drown thought—to make me forget——"

"I only wanted peace," said Frances. "And I have been very happy here with David," she added.

"Good-night," said Alix. In the hall she stooped to caress Beni. "This is Jean's dog, isn't it?" she said.

"It is mine now. M. de Vernay gave him to me," said Frances. "He thought it would be safer."

CHAPTER XXVIII

IT almost seemed to Frances that this strange elfin creature had settled down permanently to the quiet forest life at Oued Zerqa, so contented and happy did she appear to be during the days that followed. The weather was brilliantly fine and warm, and whether from weariness or disinclination or actual indolence, Alix seldom went further than the garden. She sat out in a shady spot under the orange trees and read a great deal, chiefly books about Algeria, descriptive of the places she knew, and a few French novels which from time to time had found their way to Oued Zerqa. She could not read English with any facility, though she spoke it fairly well, being like so many Russians, a born linguist.

Frances could not help seeing that one of her chief attractions at Oued Zerqa lay in the presence of little Josette de Méryville. She had the child constantly with her; she told her long stories, fairy tales, incidents from the "Thousand and One Nights," events, too, of her own desert life and of the Arab children she had known. Weird tales of afreets and djinns held the child perfectly spellbound, for Alix was a born raconteuse. Josette would sit on her knee, often nestling in her arms, and listening with rapt attention. She adored her new friend, and Alix

was oddly tender and affectionate toward the child, perhaps for the sake of the little boy born on the same day, and whose grave was in the French cemetery at Biskra.

But in spite of her apparent contentment Frances was not deceived; she knew quite well that at no remote date her guest would vanish. Undine—the beautiful woman without mercy—she seemed to be the incarnation of all those elusive, half-human creatures of legend and verse, the vague children of man's imagining; one could not hope to hold her with any human cords or ties.

"Jean is not very gallant," she remarked one morning; "he has never once been to see me. Yet I see him ride past every morning."

"He does not often come, he is too busy," said Frances. "But David is to ride with him this evening and he can tell him you wish to see him."

"Tell him to come for me at six o'clock to-morrow morning and I will ride with him," said Alix.

"Very well," said David.

The boy had been very silent since Madame Rezanoff's arrival; he seldom appeared except at meals, and spent his time in study, scarcely leaving his books. He went daily to Mass in the little church at Azeba, and generally rode for an hour or two with Jean in the evening. In accordance with his mother's request he had ceased to take long walks in the forest alone. She hoped that the Arabs were beginning to talk less about the Boy Marabout; it was some time

now since he had been fetched to visit the sick people in the gourbis.

The next morning she saw Alix start forth with Jean, wearing her Arab dress with a neatly folded turban covering her hair, and a flowing white burnous wrapped about her shoulders, for the air was cold. Jean had brought a young horse for her to ride, saddled with one of the high-backed Arab saddles to which Alix was now accustomed. Perched upon this she looked exactly like a slim, well-born Arab youth. They rode together across the plain of Azeba, along the broad, white road that wound ribbon-wise between the avenues of acacia trees, now burdened with their pendent bunches of scented snow-colored blossoms.

"Do you always keep away like this?" she asked at last, turning a little so as to look straight into Jean's eyes.

"Like this?"

"Oh, don't pretend not to understand. Here I have been nearly a week at the Blue River, and you have not once been near the house."

"Madame Amory has not asked me to come," he said. "And there has not been any business—in connection with the property—to discuss and settle."

"I think you are absurd!" said Alix.

"Absurd?" He frowned a little.

She was undeterred by the haughtiness and displeasure of his expression.

"Here you have a charming, beautiful, and sympathetic woman living near you in this gloomy

wilderness, and you will hardly speak to her. She has no other neighbors, and though she never complains she must be bored to death without a soul to speak to except those two children!" She flung the words at him with sudden defiance. "Why do you dislike her so much?"

"You make a mistake," he said coldly; "I do not dislike her. But I do not wish to intrude upon the solitude she desired to find at Oued Zerqa."

"Sometimes—it is conceivable—she might be glad to have some one to speak to," said Alix.

"I am always at the disposition of Madame Amory. She has only to send word to Aïn-Safra," he said coldly. "A few days before you came I paid her a visit. I had a matter of importance to discuss with her. Since then there has been no reason to take me to Oued Zerqa. She—she has not," he hesitated, "been complaining to you—of any neglect on my part?"

"She never says a word about it. I asked her why you didn't come, and she said you were busy. I am speaking only from my own observation!"

"If she has any cause for complaint," he went on, "she has only to tell me. I am her paid servant—her agent. I am entirely at her command!"

"That attitude is ridiculous!" said Alix vehemently; "you are her cousin—her equal in birth—in everything! It is only right that you should be friends!"

He drew himself up stiffly; his dark face was rigid. "There never could be any question of

friendship between myself and Madame Amory," he said.

"Ah, then, you do dislike her?" said Alix.

"There is no question of liking or disliking. I am in charge of her property. I obey her—as Hafsi does——"

"All this humility is a pose which does not deceive me in the least," said Alix. "You have the pride of the devil, Jean, and this pretended humility is a kind of shell into which you have crept to shield yourself from the wounds which you might receive in a position of servitude. You have been your own master too long, and I know that your position here hurts you; it has always hurt you, but you feel it more now that she has come to live here, and that you realize you are serving a woman. She isn't hard; she would always be kind and considerate, and never let you feel that you are, as you say, her paid agent——"

"She is, as you say, unfailingly kind and considerate—I have been touched by it, Alix," he said.

"Be kind to her, then!" said Alix; "she is lonely, abandoned by the one person she loves—her solitude is worse than yours!" Her gray eyes flashed; they had something of the frosty look of diamonds, and under the white turban the little pale face was suddenly passionate.

"I am sorry for her," said Jean.

"Oh, you are hopeless!" said Alix. "I suppose you are afraid, if you come often, that you might fall in love with her?"

Again there was a challenge in her reckless

words. She longed to rouse Jean's anger, and now she saw that she had succeeded. His eyes blazed with fury.

"How dare you say such a thing? And to me?"

"Why not to you?" said Alix coolly, and looking quite unperturbed. "You cannot be blind to the fact that she is beautiful and charming?"

"I decline to discuss Madame Amory with you," he said.

"How easily you take offense!" said Alix, smiling.

Jean softened reluctantly.

"You are such a child, Alix," he said. "One should never be offended with you!"

"I think yours is a case, Jean, of

'My heart and I
Love not to be beloved' . . ."

"Please do not imagine that I am the hero of a secret romance," he said.

They rode on for some little distance in absolute silence, as if exhausted by their recent vehement discussion. As they approached the village of Azeba they met David riding his pony, his face set in the direction of Oued Zerqa.

He lifted his cap. "Good morning, Madame. Good morning, Cousin Jean."

"Have you been to Mass?" asked Alix.

"Yes, madame," he answered.

"And did you pray for me, David?"

"Yes, madame," was again the answer.

"Why did you pray for me?" she inquired.

"Don't persecute the boy with questions," said Jean in a low voice.

"But I wish to know! Why did you pray for me, David?"

David was silent.

"Won't you tell me why?" she persisted. "Is it because you think I am an apostate?"

Still he was silent.

"I think you had better not waste your time in praying for me, David," she said in a light, scornful voice.

"I—pray for every one—at Oued Zerqa," he said.

"And I suppose you are very proud because the Arabs call you the Boy Marabout?" she asked, still speaking in that light and contemptuous tone.

"I never heard the name, Madame," he answered.

"They speak everywhere of your wonderful gifts," she went on, "of your ecstasies, your powers of healing, your influence over the wild birds. So, you see, you are a little saint already, and one must begin to look soon for the sprouting wings. But you must remember that a great many people don't look upon you as a saint at all, because you are only a dog of a Christian and not a good Mussulman—a faithful son of the Prophet—and these think that you are in league with all the djinns. Africa is full of djinns and afreets—you must beware of them, David, for they may prove to be stronger than you!"

"But they are not stronger than my angel-guardian," said the boy gravely.

Alix made a little grimace of impatience. "Ah!—What youthful piety!" she said. "But listen, David. I am older than you—I am almost old enough to be your mother. And I know much more about the Arabs than you do. And I am quite serious when I tell you that you must be careful. Be a little on your guard. Don't say to yourself, 'I am an English boy—what harm can happen to me?' Harm *can* happen to you in Africa."

"Thank you, madame. I will remember," said David. He took off his cap, smiled at them both, and rode off in the direction of Oued Zerqa.

"You should not have told him," said Jean; "his mother did not wish him to know that the people regard him as a marabout, nor that he is being talked about and discussed."

"But he ought to know," said Alix; "he isn't a baby—and you can take my word for it, Jean, such a reputation is a dangerous one to possess. I knew the Arabs better than you do. I speak their language as easily as I speak my own. A fanatic might think it a good deed to kill David for fear he should pervert the hearts of the faithful by his miracles. Now have I spoken plainly enough?"

Jean remembered Hafsi's mysterious warning. Was there a plot against David? He longed to ask the question, but something in her manner deterred him.

"Some of the most gruesome and sinister happenings of the bazaars never reach the ears of the outside world," said Alix; "Islam is a vast conspiracy of silence."

They rode through the narrow, crowded street with its French and Arab shops and cafés, and passed the Mairie with its sun-filled, dusty piazza, and the straight, upstanding cypress trees that seemed to pierce the blueness of the sky with their inky spires.

"David avoids me," she said musingly; "I suppose he suspects me of being an apostate, and thinks me very wicked and lost. Now Josette is a darling, and she loves me already far better than she loves Frances. I don't like to feel, though, that the boy is sitting in judgment upon me!"

"He is doing nothing of the sort," said Jean; "he is the most humble person, and has no spiritual pride whatever. You have probably made him quite unhappy by telling him what the Arabs say of him."

"I had a reason for telling him," said Alix; "they are spreading all kinds of exaggerated reports about him—and it is not safe—it is not safe, I tell you, Jean! This isn't London or Paris—it's great, savage, uncivilized Africa!"

David found his mother in the garden with Josette. The fountain was playing—gleaming as if it were spangled with gold, dropping bright burnished sequins. The roses were ablaze, wine-red, golden, and delicately white; they clustered across the pergola and up the white pillars of

the veranda. The air was heavily scented with orange blossom, its cloying sweetness was increased by the hot sunshine, and from the forest glades, beyond the house, there came the plaintive fluting of a little Arab shepherd boy calling to his flocks.

Frances turned at the sound of his footsteps. "Oh, you have come back, David! Are you not very hot?"

She stooped and kissed him; it was a relief to him to feel the soft touch of her lips on his face. Alix had succeeded in filling him with a nebulous alarm, with a vague terror of Africa, her hidden mysteries, her inviolable silences. And his mother spelt sanity and safety; he liked to feel the sanctuary of her arms about him.

CHAPTER XXIX

JEAN left Alix at the crossroads below Oued Zerqa, and refusing her invitation to come to breakfast with Mrs. Amory proceeded to Aïn-Safra alone. He was meditating uncomfortably upon Alix's words concerning David Amory. It was quite evident that, like Hafsi, she knew much more than she would say. She had learned her lesson of discretion and reticence, since the sharp experience of the saber-cut had taught her caution in her dealings with the Arabs. But through the apparent lightness of her words he had detected a genuine anxiety, a definite alarm, and a desire to protect the little son of her friend. She had been the first, too, to mention the matter to David himself. Frances had not wished that he should know, and Jean had naturally respected her wish. But Alix had overruled them all, and had made it plain that she considered it desirable that David should be informed. So she had taken the law into her own hands and had told him, perhaps in an unnecessarily brutal manner. It was as if she were determined to frighten him. He thought of her words, "A fanatic might think it a good deed to kill David." Alix was quite serious when she uttered them. He wondered if her wish to warn them had been the real motive for her unexpected

coming to Oued Zerqa. She always knew to a great extent the gossip of the bazaars. In the more remote oases of the Sahara he knew that she frequently passed for an Arab boy, and having discovered that she resembled the young son of a Caid in Tunisia she called herself by the name of this youth—Si-Aziz. She was always very reticent about her secret adventures in the desert, but Jean knew perfectly well that she carried her life in her hand. She had enemies, and if she were murdered the crime would probably never be heard of. Realizing the risks she ran she had become extremely careful. Once she had looked death in the eyes, and the remembrance made her both wary and discreet. The scar on her brow remained to remind her of this dreadful experience, and at times she still suffered unendurable pain from it, a pain that drove her under the shelter of her tent, there to seek refuge in a drugged sleep.

Jean rightly guessed that she would not remain long at Oued Zerqa now that she had delivered her message, her warning. She had only once ventured beyond the garden, and that was on the occasion of her ride with him. Few people seeing her then would identify the young Arab with Mrs. Amory's guest. She would therefore in no way be compromised, should anything happen, by her friendship for Mrs. Amory. The very fact of this friendship was quite unknown beyond the little faithful circle of friends and servants that made up the household of Oued Zerqa. Yes—he felt sure that Alix would go away as

suddenly and secretly as she had come. Jean now saw the whole situation quite clearly. She had had this definite object in view when she came to Oued Zerqa, and having accomplished it she was little likely to remain.

The most difficult part of her task had lain in approaching David. The boy had for some reason avoided her, and she had purposely stopped him that morning; had attacked him on the subject of his prayers in order to arrest his attention, to force him to speak to her. Then with cold deliberation she had set herself to frighten David, to make him realize his danger.

While she was leading this strange nomadic life of hers she was loyal to the Arabs, whether from motives of expediency alone it would have been difficult to say. But she was quickly responsive to kindness and sympathy, and in their one brief meeting at Biskra Frances had won her affection by a few gently uttered words. That affection had not then ripened into a friendship, but it had yet been sufficient to send Alix on a long journey from the desert into the Tell to warn Frances of possible danger to her son. Jean remembered that she had told him she had come from Tougourt, journeying as far as Biskra with a caravan bound northward. It was probably then at Tougourt that she had heard, or overheard, something that rendered it imperative for her to seek out Mrs. Amory. She was often capricious in her wanderings, vanishing for months and months into the desert and reappearing suddenly in Constantine or Tunis. She would spend a long time in one place, and then

take a sudden, violent dislike to it and leave it at an hour's notice. But on this occasion she had not been actuated by caprice, and she had undergone considerable fatigue and had taken a great deal of trouble in her endeavor to warn Frances and David. He was glad to think that Frances, quite unmindful of her motive, had welcomed her with such evident kindness, and had won the affection of this solitary wandering soul. Alix had few women-friends, and was accustomed to meet with severe disapproval rather than with any display of kindness, from her own sex.

Jean saw that, in the face of these two warnings, it would be incumbent upon him to watch with a greater vigilance over the fortunes of the little household at the Blue River.

If only Mrs. Amory could be made to see the advisability of at least sending David back to his father's people in England! That would, Jean thought, be a perfect solution of all difficulties, and surely, too, it would be more wholesome for this boy, by nature a contemplative, to go to school and have companions of his own age and lead the normal life of an English schoolboy. But he feared that she was little likely to adopt such a course of action or to go away herself from the one place where her husband had suggested the possibility of eventually coming to her.

That night he went out as usual into the garden before going to bed. He went to the end of the terrace and looked toward Oued Zerqa. He could just discern the lights of the house pricking the hillside like fallen stars. He had often watched them at night, he knew the order

in which each one was extinguished. Mrs. Amory's was always the last to disappear, sometimes, indeed, it was still shining when he went in to bed.

There was a moon, and it shone on the plain across which the night-mists drifted like webs of silver gossamer, the discarded insubstantial raiment of fairies. His house and garden were all painted in a subtle monochrome, the lights of luminous ivory and pearl, the shadows of ebony-colored velvet. In the grove of olives the nightingales were singing songs of matchless sweetness. Across the plain he could hear the fitful yelping of jackals and the answering bark of a Kabyle dog.

The sound of a footstep made him start. He could hear its crisp, regular fall upon the forest path. Through a group of clustered Judas trees he could see a white figure coming toward him—a burnoused and turbaned figure, slim, erect.

"It is only Alix," said a voice.

She was near him now, and the moonlight showed her face, pale, ivory-colored under the heavy folds of the white turban. The gray eyes held an expression of the most complete weariness.

"But, my dear Alix—it is past eleven o'clock—you should not go roaming about alone at this hour."

"I have my revolver," she said carelessly; "it is loaded, and you know I am a dead shot!" She laughed, and her laugh seemed to possess a strange and eerie, not quite human sound. "I am on my way back to the desert, Jean." And

she turned her face southward toward the mountains of Constantine, their silver summits gleaming in the moonlight with freshly fallen snow. "Back to my beloved desert."

"You have left Oued Zerqa?" he said.

He had not expected that her departure would take place that very night.

"I slipped out," she confessed, "when every one had gone to bed. I induced Frances to go up a little earlier than usual—she had a headache. I did not want to say any good-bys. Really, Jean, one would think I was a very sentimental person, farewells upset me so. I could not bring myself to say good-by to my darling little Josette. Nor to Frances, whom I love—for I do love her, Jean. She knows all that there is of bad in me, but it has made no difference to her. Souls are dear to her because they are dear to God. I have made her care for me a little, too. You must go and tell her to-morrow that I stole away like a thief in the night. And please ask her to send my things to Constantine—you know the address that always finds me."

"But, Alix—how shall you go? Let me come with you. Or, at least, take one of my horses."

"No—I prefer to go alone, and I shall only walk as far as the Fontaines Chaudes, and take the diligence as it passes from Azeba to-morrow morning. I shall sleep at the Fontaines Chaudes."

"Alix," he said, "I spoke sharply to you to-day. You must forgive me. I am sorry."

"Perhaps I was teasing you," she said.

"And about David, too," he reminded her. "I did not realize at the time——"

Alix glanced uneasily round as if she suspected the presence of some unseen listener.

She said then:

"The surgeon's knife is sometimes necessary!"

There was silence. Her eyes looked steadily at him; something of the frostiness of moonlight seemed to lurk in their gray depths.

"You can't persuade her to leave the Blue River?"

"I fear not," said Jean; "she has an idea her husband will be able to come there one of these days. You know he is a fugitive from justice?"

"She did not tell me—but I guessed something of the sort. Why is it that good women love—and continue to love—bad men?"

Jean shrugged his shoulders as if he had no concern with such problems.

"For she does love him," said Alix softly.

"I am sure she does." The words came harshly, abruptly, as if uttered against his will.

"And she is just—just waiting for him. Without another thought. You can see that in her eyes."

Waiting for him. Without another thought. Yes, it was true—absolutely true—every word of it.

"I am going now, Jean. Take care of Frances and David." She put out her hand; the fingertips were freshly stained with henna. He held them for a second to his lips.

"Thank you very much for coming, Alix.

You gave yourself a great deal of trouble. I thank you for all you have done——”

But this time she did not answer, and stepped back quietly into the shadows of the forest, between the dark stems of the blossom-laden Judas trees.

She seemed to vanish like a ghost in the moonlight. Jean stood staring at the retreating figure.

Waiting for him—without another thought. With the door always open at Oued Zerqa, so that coming he might enter in.

CHAPTER XXX

THE summer months passed very quietly at Oued Zerqa. There were days of fierce almost cruel heat when the sun blazed down with terrifying mercilessness, parching the plain, drying the rivers, sapping the strength of man and beast. The wooden shutters darkened every window to keep out the furnace-like blast of the sirocco, and it was only when evening came that a little cool breeze blew in like a timid caress from the sea, to refresh the weary inhabitants of the plain.

There were few changes in the little household. Josette had returned to France at the end of June, before the great heat of the summer set in. Madame de Méryville met her at Marseille and wrote letters of the deepest gratitude to Frances. She was delighted at the marked improvement in her child's health; she had grown, she had more color, she weighed more. The change had proved a perfect success, and she hoped that Madame Amory would spend some weeks with them in Paris, if she decided to return to England for the summer.

Josette had wept bitterly at Alix's sudden departure, this wayward being having captured the child's impulsive affections. Josette had adored her and could not believe that she could be so cruel as to go away without even kissing

her good-by. For several days she was quite inconsolable. It had been something of a shock, too, to Frances to find Alix gone without a word; she was almost afraid that she had said or done something to offend her, until Jean came up with his reassuring message. It was characteristic of Alix that she had never written a single line to Frances or to Jean since her departure. She had vanished into the Sahara.

All through May and June the Tell blossomed as perhaps no other place in the world can blossom. The fields were brilliant with color, which looked as if it had been laid on with a broad brush. Here a scarlet stretch of poppies, splendid as an approaching army; there a wide, blue field painted sapphire with blossoming borage that looked like an escaped patch of the vivid African sky. Crimson fields of thistles; meadows filled from end to end with the flaunting gold of marigolds, or delicately colored with the strange elusive hues of the blue thistles; hedges flushed with the tender fragile pink of oleanders, provided an endless feast for the eye. Perhaps, too, the splashes of color seemed more vivid and gorgeous against the prevailing neutral greens of the groves of olive and cork and ilex trees.

Frances's health failed a little during the great heats of July and August; she suffered from intermittent attacks of malarial fever. Fearing to go away herself she was yet afraid that David's health might suffer, and she was glad when an opportunity offered of sending him to Stora for sea-bathing under the care of some French people whom Jean knew very well.

During David's absence her life was curiously solitary and isolated. She saw very little of Jean. He remained at Aïn-Safra all through the August heats, when every North African proprietor lives in hourly fear of one great evil—that of fire. Such a fire as has been, within the memory of man, driven northward by the fierce sirocco, like an advancing pillar of flame a mile in width, approaching with red-hot wings bent on destruction, sweeping forest and field and vineyard, house and village, before it in one mighty breath. It was the fear of a calamity such as this that kept Jean ever vigilant at Aïn-Safra during those evil days of sirocco, when the mountains were hidden with the filmy dust from the Sahara, and a burning gloom lay stiflingly upon the plain of Azeba.

Frances looked thin and white by the time the vintage was over and the fresher days of October had set in. She seemed to lack her usual energy. But she was glad to have David back, looking very tanned and sunburned from his weeks of sea-bathing at the little Mediterranean fishing-village. He had had a long holiday, and now went back to work again with great industry. It was now more than a year since he had had any regular schooling, but so far she felt that the time at Oued Zerqa had been by no means wasted. It would perhaps help David ultimately to come to a definite decision about his vocation. In her own mind there was little doubt about that decision, and she forbore to question him. At his own request he began to read theology with the priest at Azeba. The boy was a

born contemplative, and when he sometimes spoke to his mother about his future career she saw that the only difficulty lay in the problem of his duty toward his future inheritance at Cold Mead.

"If Doris had only been a boy it would have made everything so much simpler," he said once when they were discussing the future together.

When he was just going to enter the church early one morning he became aware of a little Arab girl who was standing near the door. A slim, dainty creature dressed in graceful robe of rather faded blue cotton, a pink head-dress surmounting her erect, well-carried head. She wore large shining hoops fastened in her tiny ears; *khal-khals* gleamed on her bare ankles.

She smiled at David.

"Good morning, monsieur," she said shyly.

David felt in his pocket for the sou which he imagined was expected from him. The Arab children often begged from him as he rode through the streets.

"*Non, non, monsieur,*" she said.

He looked at her again; she stirred some vague chord of memory.

"Monsieur—thou hast forgotten me," she said in her pretty broken French, "but I am Kadouijah—the girl thou didst cure in the gourbi at El-Garah."

"I thought I remembered thee," said David, "but it was so dark that day I could scarcely see thy face. And art thou quite well now, Kadouijah?"

"Yes, monsieur, since that day I have been

quite well." She raised her eyes—the big, soft Arab eyes, so like a gazelle's.

"Monsieur, I am to wear a veil soon. And then I shall be married. But——" She paused.

"Well, what is it, Kadouijah?"

"I do not wish to be a Mussulman woman. I do not wish to wear the veil! They would marry me to Bou-Hassan—and I wish only to learn to worship thy God—as thou hast worshiped Him. I would learn the teaching of thy Prophet Jesus Christ who was put to death by the Jews!"

She clasped her thin little hands with the henna-stained finger-tips upon her breast, and her vivid, passionate face was raised to his with an expression of eager entreaty.

"Who taught thee about my Prophet?" he asked gently.

"I spoke with a little French girl whom I saw in the forest, the child of the overseer. She told me. And I have been in there," she nodded toward the door of the church. "I saw Him hanging on the Cross—I saw the image they keep of Him as a Child in the arms of His Mother. And Toinette told me that she prayed also to His Mother who is kind and loving to all little children, and listens to their prayers."

David was silent. It was still early and he wished to hear more.

"Monsieur, thou art a marabout—thou hast grown holy in the service of thy Prophet—I too would learn what thou hast learned—I would learn as the French children do—here in this church."

"But, Kadouijah, thy father would not permit

thee to become a Christian. Would he not be angry if he knew of this wish? How could we send thee to a school where the nuns could teach thee?"

"Yes—he would be angry——" she whispered, her eyes growing dark with fear. "Already he is angry because I wept when he told me of my having to wear the veil and be Bou-Hassan's wife."

"Kadouijah—I will ask advice of my mother. Come back here to-morrow, and I will see what can be done. Be patient."

He entered the church.

But Frances was not called upon to act as arbiter of Kadouijah's destiny. The fact of her having waited for David by the church door at Azeba quickly penetrated to the gourbi at El-Garah, for it had been market-day, and Arabs from all parts had assembled in the little town. Local gossip was always busy with David's name, and in spite of his two months' absence from Oued Zerqa curiosity was quite undiminished concerning him. Kadouijah had been staying for a few days in Azeba, and on her return to El-Garah was closely questioned by her father, who had sent to fetch her home that very afternoon. Little by little the truth was dragged from her. Trembling with fear she confessed that she had waited purposely for the Boy Marabout who had cured her with one touch of his hands, and she had asked him to teach her to worship his Prophet. She did not wish to wear a veil—to be Bou-Hassan's wife. She wished to go to a

Christian school—to learn to pray as M. David prayed, and as the French children prayed.

“See how he has perverted her,” said the old grandmother, “see what evil he has done under the cover of his miracles.”

Kadouijah’s father beat her with many stripes. Her punishment was administered that same evening, and the women crowded into the gourbi to watch the proceeding, and to listen with morbid curiosity to the child’s tortured shrieks. Henceforth the lot of Kadouijah was a bitter one. Her little face, swollen with weeping, was hidden behind the hideous black veil worn by the Algerian women; she was given hard tasks to do, and if she betrayed the slightest exhaustion or fatigue she was threatened with more blows. Subdued by pain and suffering she gave no further manifestation of rebellion.

David was a little surprised at her non-appearance on the following day, but concluded that she had changed her mind. But some days later Hafsi enlightened him as to the events consequent upon his meeting with the little girl. Kadouijah would not be allowed to leave El-Garah again. Her marriage would take place very soon. Jean also heard of the incident and felt a vague alarm. It was an unfortunate affair, and many garbled accounts of it spread through Azeba and the neighboring villages.

There had been for some days unusually heavy rains, and the Blue River was in flood; its wild murmuring as it dashed over the rocks could be plainly heard up at the house. And about a fortnight after Kadouijah’s return home, her little

body was found down by the bridge at El-Garah—the great iron bridge where the heavy mule-carts went to transport the marble from the quarries. She was quite dead when she was found, and it was thought she had been swept down the stream for some distance, so bruised and battered was the little body. In one hand she clutched a little silver medal of Our Lady which Toinette had given her, but no one ever knew whether the child had fallen accidentally into the river, or whether she had sought this desperate means of escape from her tormentors. Her father moved away from the neighborhood shortly afterward with all his family, and Jean devoutly hoped the matter would soon be forgotten.

These things which had caused him considerable anxiety were temporarily dispelled from his mind by the receipt of a telegram from Paul, announcing his arrival at the baths of Hammam-Meskoutine, where he had been taken seriously ill. He begged Jean to come to him at once, and said that he was sending his motor down to fetch him, as the journey would be more quickly made thus than by train.

It was about eight o'clock when the message came and the car was to come early, so Jean set forth at once to Oued Zerqa to inform Frances of his approaching departure. He found her in the garden, waiting for David's return from Azeba. An idea suddenly occurred to him.

"Do you think you could possibly come with me, madame?" he said. "It would be a great help, for you probably know much more of nurs-

ing than I do. And you could come back to-night in the auto if you did not wish to remain away from home."

"Of course, I will come," said Frances.

"He is evidently very ill, and he has never got over that terrible accident he had last winter. Now I must go home and get my things together, and I will come back for you in the auto."

He went away looking much relieved, and reappeared about nine o'clock. David had not returned, but Frances left a note for him telling him that she would be back that night. She thought that probably he had remained in Azeba that day to study with the priest.

They started off without further delay in the motor. The morning was fine and the sky quite cloudless. All traces of the recent rains had disappeared and the roads were perfect for traveling. Their way lay at first through the endless vineyards and cornfields that stretch between Azeba and Bône. Hedges of Barbary figs, and aloes pointed and sharp like gray menacing swords, divided the roads from the fields. They passed beneath avenues of eucalyptus trees that resembled, in their naked pallor, rows of slim, silver columns. Having followed the road to the east for some distance they struck sharply southward and began to climb the steep hills of the Tell. Looking down the valleys seemed to possess a new beauty, and the groves of cork and olive were so skilfully disposed by nature as to give them almost the appearance of a green and wooded English park, cleft here and there by a glimpse of winding, silver river. They passed

through little white villages, meeting caravans of mules and camels on the way. Sometimes they came to a lonely farm set deep in plantations of fruit trees, oranges, citrons, pomegranates and Japanese medlars. Sometimes the deep ravines were so thickly clad with overhanging brushwood that only a furtive glimpse of the river winding its way at the foot of the hills could be seen. On their way, too, they passed the little modern-looking French town of Guelma, lying like a pale scar on the hillside, standing on the site of the ancient Kalama of the Romans, of which but little trace remains.

As they approached Hammam-Meskoutine Jean pointed out to Frances the silver stream ascending like some fragile incense from the boiling streams and pools that burst out in all directions among the rocks and fields, wreathing the olives with fairy-like clouds. And mingling with the forest scents there came a powerful odor of sulphur, issuing strong and pungent from those bubbling streams.

"The Arabs call them the Baths of the Accursed," said Jean. He told Frances of the strange legend of the Arab Caïd who had resolved, in defiance of the Prophet's law, to marry his own sister, whose beauty was famous throughout the land. In spite of remonstrance the wedding took place, and as the bride and bridegroom proceeded homeward after the ceremony followed by their guests the wrath of Allah descended upon them. A violent tempest swept over the scene; an earthquake shook the hills; boiling streams of water burst out of the

earth, and when day dawned it was seen that the whole party had been turned to stone. And indeed the disposition of these enormous stones resembles a procession winding across the fields, while the two pyramid-like limestone rocks that seem to head the cavalcade, and which are supposed to be the guilty pair themselves, have all the appearance of leading the way.

As they drove up toward the hotel they saw Alix Rezanoff advancing toward them. It was nearly six months since she had left Oued Zerqa, and not a word had been heard of her since that day. She ran up to them. The car stopped; she flung her arms impulsively round Mrs. Amory's neck. "My darling little Frances!" she cried, "what a joy to see you again. I dared not hope that you would accompany Jean." She turned to M. de Vernay and held out her hand. "I came this morning," she said, "Paul sent me a telegram, and fortunately I happened to be in Constantine, so I came on at once. He is very ill, and he is so changed since he was smashed to pieces in that accident. I did not know that he had lost an arm."

She helped Frances out of the car. "You have got quite thin!" she said. "What have you been doing to yourself?"

"It was the hot summer—I was not very well. And I had fever rather badly," she explained.

"And you stayed all the time at the Blue River?" inquired Alix as they walked across the terrace, with its great orange trees and date-palms, toward the hotel.

"Yes—I could not well go away. But I sent David to Stora."

"And David is well?" she asked.

"He looks better than I have ever seen him."

"And prays as much as ever?"

"But I don't want him to pray less," said Frances, with a smile.

"But you see the way it is leading? That will be awkward, will it not?"

"I see where it is leading, and I am not at all afraid."

Jean had walked quickly forward into the hotel, leaving them alone together. Frances looked rather eagerly at Alix.

"Ah, I know what you are thinking!" said Alix gaily. "What is she doing here? Why has she come? Does she mean anything? I will spare you the trouble of asking me questions. I meant little or nothing by coming here. But now I've seen him. Frances, he looks terrible! And he has taken it so badly—he is maimed and crippled, and he wants to die——"

"And now, what are you going to do?"

"I am going to stay here and nurse him," replied Alix calmly; "and when he is well enough I am going to marry him. Oh, my dear, I thought I had got rid of chains and ties for ever and ever! But it is impossible. Come and see him, Frances."

She led the way into a room on the other side of the square formed by the buildings of the hotel, and tapped lightly at the door. "May we come in? Frances has come to see Paul."

"Come in," said Jean's voice.

They entered the darkened room. There was a figure lying on the bed, and Frances could dimly discern a pale and corpse-like face lit by two hollow, glowing eyes that looked like twin fires. And they were like Jean's eyes. But there the resemblance between the two brothers ceased.

"This is our cousin, Madame Amory," said Jean. "Permit me to present my brother Paul."

"I hope you are feeling better to-day," said Frances gently.

"It was very kind of you to come, madame," said Paul in a weak querulous voice. "Jean and Alix both answered my telegrams as soon as possible. Upon Jean I could rely—but who could say where Alix was?"

"Well, she is here now," said Alix, "and I am going to bully you until you are quite well again."

"*Well*" in a tone of angry impatience. "As if I should ever be well again! I am going to die, and the sooner the better."

But he fixed his eyes wistfully upon her small pale face.

Alix took his hand in hers and rubbed it softly. "You are cold, Paul," she said.

He was a pitiful wreck, thin, emaciated. Ten months had passed since his accident, and how he had escaped death on that occasion none of those who saw his machine fall could ever imagine. During the weeks when his brother remained with him at Tunis he had lain between life and death. One arm had been amputated, and he was still unable to move without crutches. He had come

back a changed man to a changed world; a world of sofas and soft cushions, of warmed and darkened rooms; of slow journeying, of lying out in the sun, the life of the couch; the sad, stricken life of an invalid. He was barely thirty-three, being a few years younger than Jean, and he now looked fifty. His hair was perfectly white, and his face was lined and wrinkled from perpetual suffering. From being one of the most intrepid aviators, reckless of danger, he had become a mere bundle of nerves. A sudden sound made him tremble. And all through the weeks and months of his grim conflict with death Alix had never come near him, never sent him a single line. He knew that she had been at Biskra when the news of his flying-accident came, and that Jean had told her of it. She had deliberately vanished into the fastnesses of the Sahara where no further news could reach her. The silences of the desert had enfolded her. Now he had seen her again, and she had looked at him with something like pity in her beautiful gray eyes. She did not tell him that his voice had seemed to be calling her always—always through the months of silence, and that at last she had obeyed it and had come to Constantine, just in time to hear that he was lying dangerously ill at Hammam-Meskoutine.

She would fight no more. He appealed to her now as he had never appealed to her before. She saw his loneliness, his suffering, his misery. The limp, empty sleeve, the drawn, emaciated face, the bitter mouth and eyes—all told her the same story. She was nearer to loving this wretched, broken Paul than she had ever been before. She

touched the sleeve now with a quick, impulsive gesture. "Paul—you never told me this!"

"Would it have made any difference? Besides, I tried to tell you. I sent you all the papers."

"I never read horrors," said Alix, who had thrown them away after a glance at the headlines.

"And you never wrote," said Paul querulously.

"My dear Paul—I gave up civilization long ago! There was no room for pens and ink and paper in my tent!"

Paul smiled in spite of himself. "Still the same Alix," he said.

She bent down and whispered in so low a tone that Jean and Frances, who had moved nearer the door, could not hear the words.

"No," she said, "it is not the same Alix. You have never seen this one until to-day!"

Something new and tender in her voice arrested his attention. "What do you mean—what do you mean?" he said, and put out his uninjured hand toward her. Alix bent down and kissed the thin fingers.

"This Alix loves you a little, Paul," she said, her eyes shining.

"Don't mock me now that I am dying," he said roughly; "how often have I told you that I loved you—that my life was nothing but a misery without you? How often have I entreated you to be my wife?"

"A great many times," said Alix calmly; "more than I could ever count! But next time you do so you will have a different answer."

"Is this true, Alix?" he said.

"Yes," she answered; "it is quite true. I will make a bonfire of my burnous and turban, just to show you how dreadfully serious I am! Now, will that satisfy you? Or perhaps you have changed your mind? In that case I will go back to the desert."

"Alix—beloved——" he said entreatingly.

"And you'll promise to try and get well, Paul?"

"I—promise," he said, with a faint smile. "Jean—is Jean there?"

Jean stepped back into the room and came up to the bed. "Did you want me, Paul?"

"Only to tell you that Alix has promised to be my wife."

"I am very glad to hear it," he said; "my felicitations, Paul."

She smiled at him. "Frances knows already," she said; "and I am sure she is kind enough to be pleased."

"And the desert, Alix?" said Jean wonderingly.

"I shall never go back to the desert. But sometimes we will go and look at it from El-Kantara and Biskra, will we not, Paul?"

Jean and Frances left them and Alix sat by the bedside.

There was a long silence. At last he said: "I can hardly believe that you are there—that you won't vanish——"

"Paul—you must believe me now when I say that I shall not vanish."

"I've thought bitter things of you, Alix, since

I've lain ill, suffering the tortures of the damned."

"You suffered—very much——?"

"The cup was quite full," he said grimly. "And I cursed you sometimes for your hardness, your indifference, your cruelty! But my heart is as much yours as it was the first day I ever saw you in Paris with René beside you, and your little baby in your arms!"

"Ah—you remember?" she said, and caught her breath quickly.

"I remember—everything——" he said, "and I have loved you always in spite of all things. If I had ever been able to give up loving you I should have hated you—I did try and hate you——"

So she had never been able to kill his love. It was stronger than her own pitiless cruelty. He had tried to hate her and failed.

She was entangled in the mesh of this broken, ruined life.

"If I do get better, you will marry me soon, Alix?"

She said quietly: "Whenever you wish."

"I thought, perhaps, we might be married in Azeba. You could stay with this Mrs. Amory, couldn't you? And I with Jean. That sounds the simplest——"

Alix was silent. She felt the touch of the chains already.

"I should like the wedding to be in Azeba," he said.

"Must it be—in church, Paul?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean you are asking a great deal——"

"Why?"

"I gave up my religion long ago," she said.

"The Church is always ready to forgive," he said.

"Only if one asks for forgiveness. And I can't ask——"

"Have you been happy since you gave it all up, Alix?" he asked.

"I have not been unhappy," she said evasively.

"I gave it up wilfully, deliberately. I ceased to think of it. But when I went to Oued Zerqa in the spring——"

"Yes?"

"There was that boy of Mrs. Amory's. He is a kind of contemplative. I think he will be a monk one of these days. He avoided me—I saw that it hurt him to do so—I had a superstitious feeling that he could see into my soul—that he saw it full of darkness, a soul separated from God by the malice of its own sin. It made me think of the days when I was not so separated. Paul, I saw my soul as David Amory saw it, and I went away—I tried to forget. For a little while the vision haunted me, but I succeeded at last in forgetting it. It was very morbid of me, very foolish——"

"Tell me more about the Amorys," he said gently.

"There are only two of them—the mother and son. Oued Zerqa belongs to her, and she came there nearly a year ago because she lost her fortune. Paul, I sometimes think that Jean is in love with her."

"But she's got a husband, hasn't she?" he asked.

"Yes—such a husband. A fugitive from justice—he escaped before his trial—I never knew exactly what he had done."

"Quite a new experience for Jean," said Paul. "Does—she respond?"

"You are making a mistake," said Alix; "Mrs. Amory knows nothing about it—I sometimes doubt if he realizes it himself—he has indignantly denied such a thing to me! But he keeps away from her as much as possible, he is hardly even polite. That is well, for Mrs. Amory is an Englishwoman, very conventional and extremely pious. It would shock her terribly if she thought any one could fall in love with her—she would, I am sure, leave Oued Zerqa at once."

"But this husband of hers is a scamp, I suppose?" he said, feeling a vague interest in his brother's neighbors.

"She loves him, nevertheless," said Alix; "I don't suppose she even believes that he is guilty. Some women are like that, it hurts their pride to think they have loved an unworthy object, so they won't allow themselves to acknowledge its worthlessness. That is just Mrs. Amory. She continually mourns for her poor misjudged, injured, innocent Aubrey . . ."

"I could hardly see her," said Paul, "but I liked her voice. Is she pretty?"

"Oh, she is quite beautiful," said Alix; "and she has been like an angel to me. I love her—but the boy made me angry. And yet I saw that he could not help his attitude toward me—it

made him unhappy, too. I felt that he was praying for me and I did not want his prayers. I wanted to be left alone in my rebellion. Not to have people mourning and weeping and praying over me. And then——”

“And then?” he said, putting up his hand and touching her face.

“It seems I am making my confession to you, Paul. Well, then I had a horrible idea that David saw only a glimpse of my soul—a mere shadow of its darkness, whereas God saw it all—all its malice—all that was evil in it—all its blackness. And I saw it, too—and I felt that I could have fled to the ends of the earth to forget the sight. I forgot, you see, that I took my own soul with me—with its horrors, its blackness——”

“Alix—perhaps God allowed you to have that vision—so that you might have the grace to change—to come back to Him——”

She rose as if half ashamed of having told him so much.

“I am going now to find Jean and Frances,” she said.

CHAPTER XXXI

FRANCES was on her way back to Oued Zerqa in the motor. She had left Hammam-Meskoutine immediately after dinner, for she saw that her presence was no longer necessary, and she felt a little uneasy at remaining so long away from home. Paul was in good hands, and the doctor who had come out hurriedly from Constantine thought well of him, and seemed to regard his condition as less serious than could have been expected. Last night's attack with its severe paroxysms of pain had no doubt weakened an already exhausted constitution, but by the evening his pulse was already better, and by the time Frances left he was sleeping peacefully.

There was no moon that night, but the stars were shining brilliantly, and the Milky Way, or, as the Japanese call it, the River of Heaven, made a scarf of palest silver across the sky, spangled with stars as with clusters of golden sequins. The car went very swiftly, and its powerful lamps lit up the road in front of them with their fierce white glare. She could see the mountains lying as if they were asleep under the stars that came so close to their summits, and the mysterious darkness of the forest with its deep groves of cork and ilex and olive trees.

It was nearly midnight when she came in sight of Oued Zerqa, and as the car sped up the road toward the house it struck her with a vague sense of misgiving that the place had a deserted, uninhabited look. There were no lights anywhere; even the one in the hall seemed to have been extinguished. She had not intended, of course, to return so late, but she had waited to hear the verdict of the doctor. It was possible that Anna and Hafsi had concluded that she was going to pass the night at Hammam-Meskoutine, and had gone to bed.

The car drew up in the road below, and she asked the chauffeur to wait there for a few moments while she went and roused some one. The man was to remain at Aïn-Safra that night, and return to Hammam-Meskoutine in the morning. She did not want him to leave without having some refreshment, as it was so late.

Frances went rather quickly up the path that led into the garden and so into the hall. The door was open, but within it was quite dark, and as she entered she felt that her foot struck against something that was lying on the floor. The suddenness of the contact made her stumble; she nearly fell. But recovering herself she groped her way to a shelf where a candle and matches were always kept. She lit the candle and found there were now no matches left in the box; she had used the last. She went back to the spot near the entrance, and saw then that the object against which her foot had struck was Beni. Until that moment she had forgotten Beni; she had never felt any surprise that he had not run

out to greet her as he always did. Now she saw that he was lying there quite inert, apparently fast asleep. But something unnatural about the dog's position struck her, and bending down she saw that his head was stained, and that instead of looking white it was both dark and wet. Something dark and wet, too, was staining the tiles around him. The dog was dead, with an ugly shot wound in the head; he was lying literally in a pool of blood.

Frances fled upstairs to David's room, trying to call him as she went. But she opened her mouth as one does in a nightmare, and no sound issued from her lips. She felt as if something were clutching her throat, strangling the sound. The door of David's room was wide open and there was no light there. As she approached it a gust of wind blew violently through the open window and extinguished her candle. She was once more in darkness. She seemed to be alone in a vast, empty house—empty of everything human, and peopled only with horrors that hindered her footsteps, and rendered her dumb and speechless. . . .

She found her way into David's room, ran toward the bed, knocking down a chair as she went. She flung herself across the bed, and opened her arms to clasp David—to reassure herself of his safety.

The bed was empty, and she could feel that the bedclothes were all disordered; some of them were hanging down to the floor.

David was not there.

She groped on her hands and knees about the

empty, darkened room, feeling with her hands on the floor and against the walls for her boy. She called him now: "*David—David—*" but there was no answer. If he were indeed here he must be lying as Beni was lying in the hall below, inert, incapable of answering. She beat her hands in utter futility against this darkness, which seemed like a thick and tangible curtain that hurt her eyes and made them smart with the effort to penetrate it. It was a terrible thing, hiding her boy from her, rendering her powerless to find him. She tried to pray, but the words refused to come. She found her way at last to the open door, and creeping along the passage went to the top of the stairs and listened attentively. All was quite, quite silent—as silent as death; as silent as a house to which death has newly come, hushing the voices of the living awed by its presence. There was no sound anywhere. She slipped down the stairs and into the hall. On the doorstep she could dimly discern a figure—the figure of a man. At first she did not recognize him, and her terror at seeing another phantom in this place of the dead caused her to scream—a loud and piercing shriek that rang through the house, and then left it more silent than before. The man stepped forward. He spoke reassuringly, and she recognized his voice as belonging to Paul's chauffeur, astonished, perhaps, by her long absence inside the house, and apparently awaiting her permission to go on to Aïn-Safra. "What is it, madame?" he asked anxiously. "Is there anything wrong?"

"Fetch a light—a light—as quickly as you can.

I can not find M. David," she said. He pulled some matches out of his pocket and struck one. For a moment the place was illuminated, and he stared uncomprehendingly at the dog lying so still at his feet. The match flared and then went out. He had seen Mrs. Amory's pale, distraught face, he had seen the dog lying dead in the hall. What did it mean? "Light another match," said Frances in a quick tone of command; "I have a candle."

He lit the candle and Frances took it, and carefully shielding its wan and feeble flame went upstairs and back to David's room. The scene that met her eyes was exactly what she had expected to see. The bed was disturbed; the bedclothes were disarranged; there might have been perhaps some kind of struggle; it was difficult to tell. The table by the bedside was overturned, a candlestick lay on the floor, and the books had been scattered. She looked everywhere, in the wardrobe, under the bed, behind the curtains, in every corner—but in vain. There was no sign anywhere of David.

The chauffeur had followed her. "Madame is looking for some one?"

"I am looking for my son. They have taken him away. And they have killed poor Beni. I must go and find Hafsi."

Again she went downstairs, the candlestick swaying in her hands. She called: "Hafsi—Hafsi!" When she had reached the hall she looked behind a curtain into the little room where Hafsi always slept. She saw the Arab lying there fast asleep. She could hear his heavy

breathing; it was something of a relief to her to know that he had not been killed.

"Will you wake him?" she said to the man.

He shook him, shouted to him. Hafsi slept on. There was a strange odor in the air.

"He has been drugged, madame. I can not wake him." He lifted Hafsi's head, but the moment he released it, it fell back heavily.

"Anna!" cried Frances. "Where is Anna—my maid?"

She made breathless search for Anna. The maid was not in her room. She had evidently been to bed, for her bed bore signs of having been slept in. Perhaps she had been awakened by the noise of the shot which had killed poor Beni, and had gone in search of David. That would surely have been her first impulse, for she was a strong, courageous woman, devoted to the boy whom she had known from a baby. None of the other servants slept in the house; they had a small suite of apartments in a separate building in the garden, just beyond the end of the new wing. Perhaps Anna had gone thither to wake them—to summon their help.

A curious change came over Frances at this point. She was not now at all afraid; fear had dropped from her like a mantle; all her numbness and exhaustion following upon that first great shock had vanished. She did not feel like herself at all; rather, she felt as if some strong and vital personality had usurped her body and was urging it to unwonted action, stimulating and galvanizing what had just now been helpless with dread and terror and grief. She

seemed to be in a sense quite out of herself, and as if she were watching the efforts of her own body with a curious amazement at its unsuspected capacities, its eager endeavors aroused by this new will, this new intelligence that was dominating it so ruthlessly, so unsparingly. And her body was not frail nor weak nor tired, but eager, submissive, anxious to obey the least mandate of this superior personality that now informed it. As she ran down the length of the dark veranda and across the path that divided the servants' quarter from the rest of the house, she perceived that her body had become quite powerful, indifferent to sorrow or danger; it was hard and brave, its only sensation was this stupendous vitality, this wonderful compelling energy. She could now understand why people were able at times to perform acts of astonishing courage, feats that seemed almost incredible and impossible.

At the door of the servants' quarter she came face to face with Anna. She saw her quite distinctly, for the door near which she was standing was open and a light burned within. And she became aware that since she had last seen her, some thirteen or fourteen hours ago, Anna had aged a good deal. She looked quite like an old woman. Her roughened hair was hanging over her shoulders with a kind of disheveled, demoralized look; her face was haggard and wrinkled; her eyes and lips were swollen and purple, like those of a person who has been crying unrestrainedly for a long time. Sometimes a sudden physical accident will in a few minutes impart this

demoralized aspect to its victim, destroying all trace of comeliness. But it was hardly possible that Anna could have met with an accident. Who could wish to harm an excellent and faithful soul like Anna? True, the house had been broken into, and Beni had been killed, shot dead at his post, and David was nowhere to be found, while Hafsi lay in a drugged sleep from which he could not be aroused, but all these calamities should not necessarily have endowed Anna with such a changed appearance. It was as if she had undergone some mysterious but deliberate process of degradation. Frances heard herself accosting her in a loud voice that did not seem to belong to her at all.

"Anna, why are you not in bed? Why is the house in darkness? I have come back to find everything disturbed. *Where is M. David?*"

Ah, yes—she remembered now that was the question she had been wishing all the time to ask Anna, that was why she had hurried out here to look for her—she wanted particularly to know where David was. Where was he? Why was he not asleep in bed?

Anna's behavior matched her appearance. She flung herself heavily upon the ground at her mistress's feet, wringing her hands like a demented person. "*Madame—madame—madame——!*" She screamed the words in shrill crescendo as if she were in torment. The calm, reasonable, self-possessed, and helpful Anna! She had been frightened, perhaps, by the darkness and silence of the house, just as Frances herself had been frightened until this new, strong

intelligence had taken command of her body, making it once more powerful and capable. Anna seemed to her at that moment to represent Fear; terror had taken possession of her; she was Fear incarnate. And it was this thing which had degraded her, and demoralized her personal appearance as if it had been a physical, rather than a moral, process.

"Madame—a gun was fired. It woke me, and I got out of bed thinking the house had been attacked. I listened at the door—I heard voices—footsteps—and I looked out very cautiously, and there were some Arabs descending the stairs. Their faces were veiled like women, as they say the faces of the Touaregs are veiled. They were carrying something—something that did not move. And when I ran to M. David's room he was not there—he was not there!"

She lay at Frances's feet moaning and wailing like a wild beast that has been cruelly wounded by the hunter. It passed through Frances's mind that she looked less like a degraded human being than an animal.

"You made no attempt to stop them?" asked Frances with something of severity in her tone.

"Madame, at first I could not move. I was too frightened—I could not move or speak. And there were so many of them, and I had heard them fire their gun. Three or four great, tall men with veiled faces. But I could see their fierce, horrible eyes. And when I ran after them down the stairs—it was too late, for they made great haste, and I heard down there in the road the sound of a motor—I saw the lights vanishing

—they went toward Bône—not toward Azéba —,”

“And do you think M. David was in that motor, Anna?”

“Madame—surely that bundle that they carried in their arms must have been M. David. He was asleep, I think, for he did not make any sound, he did not struggle or move. They must have put him to sleep early in the evening as they did Hafsi. For I tried to rouse Hafsi, but I could not wake him, though I struck him heavy blows!”

“If the servants are awake, Anna, tell them to come out. I wish to speak to them.”

The two Algerian women appeared pale and frightened. They had already heard Anna’s terrifying description of the veiled men, and had run back to their rooms cowering with fear. But they obeyed Frances when she told them to come out.

No—they had seen nothing; they knew nothing, until Mademoiselle Anna came out to inform them of the disaster. M. David had dined as usual at half-past seven; he had complained to Hafsi that the coffee was not nice, and he had left quite half of it in his cup. She, the cook, had tasted it and did not like it—it had a queer, bitter taste, and Mademoiselle Anna had drunk some, too, but not much, and they gave what remained to Hafsi, who finished it. Afterward he said he felt tired and sleepy, and would go to lie down and sleep until madame came home.

The young Arab boy who helped in the kitchen had made the coffee that evening, as he often

did. He had gone out after dinner and said he would not be back till the morning.

That was all the information she could get, and turning away Frances walked slowly back to the darkened house. The chauffeur was still standing by the front door.

"This house must have been attacked," she said; "my maid saw some Arabs with veiled faces carrying a bundle downstairs which she thinks must have been M. David. You see, they were careful to drug Hafsi and to kill Beni. They must have known of my absence, and perhaps they knew, too, that M. le Comte had left Aïn-Safra. Anna says she heard the sound and saw the lights of a motor going toward Bône. What can we do?"

"Is it long since they started, madame?"

"I don't know. I will ask Anna." She called her, and Anna came slowly up the path, dragging her feet.

"Anna, when did all this happen?"

"Madame, it must have been about eleven o'clock."

"They have been gone more than an hour," said Frances.

"If madame permits me I will go along the road and see if I can find any trace of them," said the man eagerly.

"Is it safe for you alone?"

"I have a revolver, madame. And there is no one to go with me."

"No," she said, "we can not wake Hafsi, and the others are too frightened. I would go myself, but I think I ought to remain here in case they

are mistaken and M. David returns. I do not know what to do for the best." She put her hand up to her forehead with a bewildered gesture, and suddenly there came a great wish into her heart that Jean could have been there now. She wished she could consult him; she was sure that he would have had something to suggest.

"And if you do not see them, would you mind going back to-night to Hammam-Meskoutine and telling M. le Comte what has happened, and asking him to come as early as he can?"

The man bowed and said: "Very well, madame. Good night, madame. Madame is not afraid of being left here to-night?"

"Oh, no," she said, "I am not at all afraid. I am only afraid on account of my son."

CHAPTER XXXII

FRANCES did not go to bed. She was conscious neither of fatigue nor exhaustion. And though the strange energy which had stimulated her to exertion and action during the hours that succeeded her return had left her body, it seemed to have taken the same arbitrary control of her mind. Her mind was so active that she knew if she did go to bed she would be unable to sleep. Over and over again she went through the scene of her return. She saw the darkened house which had first aroused misgivings in her heart; she entered the hall, and in so doing stumbled against that inert mass which afterward proved to be poor Beni's dead body, the dog that had been Jean's first and only gift to her, and who had died at his post. She remembered, rather inconsequently, but with an intensity that almost released the frozen fount of her tears, that when Jean had first brought Beni to her he had bidden the dog "die for her," and Beni had flung himself to the ground in a ridiculous simulation of death. And in some faithful manner that no one would ever really know, Beni had died for her. It had evidently been necessary to kill the dog in order to effect an entrance into the house. Her thoughts traveled on through the awful anguish of the next scene when she had run upstairs, with limbs almost paralyzed with terror, to assure her-

self that David was safely in his room. She felt the rush of cold air touching her hand as the candle went out, and she was left for the second time in total darkness. She saw herself creeping round David's room, feeling for him in the bed and on the floor, touching the walls with her hands, and trying to call to him while her throat refused to utter a single sound. This was the part of that night's happenings upon which in after days she was least able to dwell. It seemed always to her as if she had been suddenly cast into some outer darkness, in which she was forcibly separated from her darling child. She had tried to pray, and she could not pray. Words and utterance failed her. She had felt herself suddenly and dreadfully separated from all dear and holy things. She told herself that the physical fact of finding herself alone in the darkness had produced within her this agonized sense of complete desolation. Even the horror of her meeting with Anna had had no power to hurt nor alarm her. By that time she had been able to pray, though the prayer had been but a simple ejaculation, such as she had learned to say on first awakening when she was a little girl. And as if in reply to her prayer there had come to her that power, that energy, which had made action so wonderfully easy, and chased fear away, and had made her cool and full of a courage that did not seem like her own. That courage did not leave her as she sat there quietly in her study waiting for the dawn to come. She could do nothing all through these hours of darkness; she could only wait there patiently and pray. She prayed at in-

tervals, often saying the words mechanically and carelessly; her mind was full of distractions. But the mere saying of the words comforted her.

She noticed that David had left some of his books in her study; they lay in a neat heap on the table. Once she took them up and glanced at them carelessly. Some were lesson books—a Greek grammar, a history, a book of French poetry. There was a notebook, too, with many entries written in David's hand. She had always been proud of his handwriting, and the notes were very clearly written. One page struck her with peculiar significance. It had been copied from the works of St. John of the Cross which David had recently borrowed from the priest at Azeba: "*The journey of the soul to the Divine union is called night for three reasons. The first is derived from the point from which the soul sets out, the privation of the desire of all pleasures in all the things of this world, by an entire detachment therefrom. This is as night for every sense of man. The second, from the road by which it travels; that is faith, for faith is obscure, like night, to the intellect. The third from the goal to which it tends, God—incomprehensible and infinite, who in this life is as night to the soul. We must pass through these three nights if we are to attain to the Divine union with God.*" And further on she found this: "*The one essential thing is to know how to deny oneself completely both interiorly and exteriorly and to consecrate oneself to Christ and to suffer for His sake the most absolute annihilation of self.*" An-

other excerpt brought the unwilling tears to her eyes and she realized how great an effort she had been making all this time to keep herself from crying: *I can but repeat that Christ is the way and that to enter upon that Way is to die to our natural self in all that relates both to sense and spirit.*

The sight of his writing, together with this evidence of the trend of his reading and of his thoughts, broke down the iron control that had encased Frances as in some kind of impregnable armor. She wept in unrestrained fashion for a few minutes. Her boy had, perhaps, desired suffering, he might even have prayed for it, as is the manner of those who desire the more perfect way, and now, perhaps, his prayer had been answered, and he would have sufferings to endure. She could not think of it. All his life she had guarded him and watched over him. And now he was gone; he had been taken from her. Little by little the warnings she had received from time to time crept back to her memory. Hafsi had warned her, and Alix had warned her; Alix had even gone further and spoken to David himself. And there had been so recently the incident of little Kadouijah's death—Kadouijah who had wished to become a Christian, and whose bruised and battered body had been found in the floods of the Blue River under the iron bridge at El-Garah. These broken, detached things had at last resolved themselves into the pitiless links of a tremendous calamity, in which her very walls had been violated as by the hand of a merciless enemy, and her son had been torn from her.

Dawn came at last, the reluctant pale dawn of autumn outlining first the eastern hills, fringed with floating scarves of mist that drifted upward to lose themselves in the sky. She saw it grow dimly white above those colorless hills, gaining in glory of gold and rose and opal as the first rays of the sun appeared, those slanting rays pale as a primrose. Then came the slow pageant of the day, a marvel of pure and brilliant light, with the mountains colored like pansies beneath it, and their forms etched in sharp, true lines. Not a blurred outline anywhere, not a single ragged edge to diminish their clear splendor. There was a cool freshness in the air that revived and invigorated Frances. She knew that the day would bring Jean, and that Jean would find some means of helping her. Yes—however much he might dislike her he would be a little sorry for her now; he would not refuse to help her.

It was very difficult for her to believe that David had really gone. The catastrophe made but an incredible sequence to all the disastrous misfortunes that had swept over her life like a flood. Even as she had not at first been able to believe that Aubrey had left her, disappearing out of her life as it seemed forever, so now she had the same inability to envisage the loss of David. Anna's story of the veiled Arabs seemed to her too much like the wild invention of a terrified woman's imagination. Still, there was the story of the coffee, corroborated by the condition of Hafsi, whose stertorous breathing she could hear at intervals through the silence of the house. She had in-

sisted that Anna should go to bed. Her presence disturbed and irritated her. She was so violently uncontrolled, so hysterical, and Frances felt a strong wish to send her out of her sight. She preferred to be alone. She was not afraid of any renewed attack; the worst had happened, and she had nothing new left to fear. *Quomodo sedet sola civitas*. And she sat there, the last left upon the desolate ruins of her city, her palace.

It was about eight o'clock in the morning when she heard the sound of a motor coming at quick speed along the road. She rose, pushed the loose, disarranged hair from her brow, and went out upon the terrace. Some late roses still hung beautifully crimson across the pergola, there was a scent of violets that filled the air with delicate perfume. The sunlight hurt her eyes, which already ached and smarted from their long vigil; she put her hand up to cover them with a quick gesture of pain. She had not cried much nor for long, but her head ached and her eyes felt swollen as if she had been crying a great deal. She saw Jean alight from the motor and run quickly up the path.

Now that he had come, a certain constraint and timidity seized her. Perhaps he would be annoyed at being summoned back thus from Hammam-Meskoutine. Perhaps he had wished to remain with his sick brother. But the servant had obeyed her orders, and it was her servant who stood before her, eager and willing to help her. He had come very early, therefore he had evidently felt that her need was a pressing one

and the matter serious. She saw a suggestion of alarm and anxiety in his face, too long trained to hide its innermost feelings beneath an iron mask of self-control and indifference.

"Good-morning, madame. I came as soon as I could, but the chauffeur did not return to Hammam-Meskoutine till four o'clock this morning with your message. He had been a great many miles down the Bône road—nearly as far as Duvivier, in fact—in the hope of overtaking the other car. But he saw no sign of it."

While he was speaking Frances kept her hands clasped closely together, and her tired eyes were fixed upon him.

"I have been waiting all night," she said at last. "I have not seen any one. It was very kind of you to come so soon."

It was a relief to find her so outwardly calm. He had not expected this hard endurance, this complete absence of tears and emotion. He was amazed at her quiet, controlled manner. The violence of the shock, of the hideous experience of returning to find David gone, had no doubt stunned her into this quiescence.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

"I will do anything you suggest," she said; "if you are able to leave Paul, I should be glad if you—could stay and help me."

"But, madame—of course I will stay and help you. Even if Paul were not better, my duty lies here—with you. And he had a good night, I left him asleep, and Alix will look after him."

"What can we do?" she said. "I will do everything you tell me. If it is a question of money—

or a ransom, Stephen will pay any sum. What do you think can have happened to David?"

"I do not think, madame, it will be a question of money. But it means, so far as I can see, one of two things."

"And they are? Please tell me quite frankly. Do not be afraid."

"Madame, this may have been an act of revenge. It is known that Kadouijah's father attributes her death, which he thinks was suicide, to the influence of David. She wished to become a Christian, and she killed herself rather than become a Mahommedan wife. Those are the bare facts of the story, and if it is an act of revenge we must fear the worst."

"Do you mean they will kill him?" she asked, her eyes large with horror.

Jean bowed his head. "And in the other case he may simply have been stolen on account of his gifts, which the Arabs regard as supernatural. To them such things are of pecuniary value. A marabout receives very large sums and offerings for his so-called miracles. So that David may be simply taken to some remote oasis, not too far from a caravan route, where great efforts will be made to induce him to become a Mussulman. He will be exploited by some impecunious caïd as a marabout, and enrich him by this means."

She knew now that Jean believed that something dreadful had happened to her boy. He was to suffer, as he had, perhaps, prayed to suffer, this child of assured holiness whose life of detachment and contemplation had been so strange a thing to witness. And she was quite

powerless; she could not save him. She felt that she could have so willingly given him up to God, but this suspense, this ignorance of his fate, was the one unbearable thing. It would have been easier to know him lying dead in the little room upstairs, that was now ravished of his beloved presence. Evil forces had been at work, plotting in the darkness. He was lost in the terrible immensity of Africa, somewhere in those miles and miles of gloomy forests, in those miles and miles of unexplorable sands, the dry, empty, pitiless sands of the Sahara.

In the study she faced Jean, who was tormented into silence by her wistful, altered looks, the heavy eyes, large with want of sleep, the deathly pallor of her face, the nervous motions of those clasped, fragile hands.

"Do not let anything I am saying make you give up hope," he said at last. "It is too soon to do that. If he is to be found, we shall find him."

"You know they killed Beni?" she said suddenly.

"Yes, I know," he said.

"You did all you could and I was wilfully obstinate—I would not let the door be shut at night. That made it so easy, did it not, for them? And even poor Beni was unequal to the task of guarding the house. I have been very culpable—very much to blame. But you can see for yourself that I have been punished——"

She sank into a chair and hid her face in her hands. Jean thought that she was praying.

"You were not to blame," he said harshly; "if

they were bent on trapping David they would have found another means, another opportunity. That is why I do not believe they have murdered him. They could have achieved that so easily—a chance shot when he was walking or riding alone in the forest. Who would have been any the wiser? It is my belief he has been kidnapped because of what they believe to be his magic power—his supernatural gifts. You,” and he looked at her almost sternly, “will want all your courage. You must hope and pray. Wherever David is, he is most surely in the hands of God!”

The news of David's disappearance spread quickly through Azeba and the neighboring villages of the plain. There was undoubted evidence of a preconceived and deliberately premeditated plot, carried out under cover of darkness, and in the temporary absence of Frances and Jean.

The priest could throw no light upon David's movements after he rode back to Oued Zerqa on the morning of the fatal day. He seemed to have spent the remainder of the day in quiet study, awaiting his mother's return. Hafsi, when he awoke, could only say that he waited upon him at luncheon and dinner, but he remembered nothing after drinking the coffee, which the other servants as well as David had done no more than taste. He had heard nothing of the shot which had killed Beni. Anna was the only witness who could throw any light upon the subsequent events of the night; she was also the only one who had actually seen the miscreants, and it was felt that her evidence, wild as it was,

was in the main sufficiently reliable. The kitchen boy who had made the coffee had not returned, and there could be little doubt that he was the accomplice within the walls, since he had fled and nothing had been seen of him.

Jean and Frances interviewed the Commissaire de Police, the Judge, and all the minions of the law domiciled in Azeba. Telegrams were dispatched to all the principal towns and villages giving a description of the missing boy, and ordering that all motors should be carefully searched. The ports of Algeria were also closely watched. A clue was discovered a few days later when, in a distant and lonely road beyond Constantine, a much-damaged motor-car was found half submerged in the river. Inquiries proved that it had been hired in Constantine some weeks earlier by a gentleman who was believed to be French, but the name and address he had given were now found to be false. All traces had been adroitly concealed. The following up of each faint clue only led to a blind alley of failure. The disappearance of David Amory was complete.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE moon shone on the terrace, touching the great fronds of the date-palms with a subdued silver. The closely growing orange and lemon trees were dark with mysterious shadows, and by contrast the paths looked pallid, the little stones upon them gleaming like crystal. Alix had wandered out of the hotel, and was going beyond the garden toward the rising wreaths of steam that looked like the forms of insubstantial wraiths in the moonlight.

For a fortnight past she had been in close attendance upon Paul de Vernay, had nursed him back to a frail semblance of health, and tomorrow Jean was to come and fetch him and take him back to Aïn-Safra to complete his convalescence. For the moment her task would be finished, and a few weeks of freedom lay before her. Then, as soon as he was well enough, their wedding was to take place.

} So far it had been thought best not to tell him of David's disappearance. He must be spared all worry and agitation.

She had come out to-night to be alone, and to think of Frances, and of this fresh trouble and disaster which had come upon her. She had wished for a little time quite by herself to think the matter over, and decide in which direction her

duty lay. Alix was not happy. She saw everything darkly. She owed a great deal to Frances; she owed, perhaps, still more to David, who in some obscure and mysterious manner had enabled her to have that one petrifying vision of her own soul. She could not forget it. All those months in the desert had not enabled her to forget it; the loathsome thing had come with her, had forced her to examine herself interiorly, and to look upon the darkness that surrounded it. She had returned to Constantine with the determination to seek out Frances once more and entreat her help. This woman was both kind and good; she was brave in the face of calamity; she had held out a welcoming hand of friendship to Alix. Then Paul's telegram had come, and she had gone straight to Hammam-Meskoutine to nurse him. She had promised to marry him. He had caught her on a wave of renunciation; all that was tender and pitying in her nature had responded to his call. And with it there opened, as if automatically, the door that led her back to the Church she had deliberately and wilfully forsaken. It was the one thing she realized from which she had never freed herself completely. It had always been there in the background, with its teaching so remorseless, so definite, for the apostate so appalling and so awful. She had seen her rebellion in its true light, a puny, miserable, futile thing that yet had the power to shrivel and destroy her immortal soul. She knew that to David she had been a thing of horror, because he had had a definite vision of her soul in its wilful abandonment. The boy had tried to hide

his knowledge from her, had tried to avoid her, had tried to accuse himself of sins against charity because he had not been able to endure her presence in his mother's house. His attitude had wounded her pride as it had never been wounded; it had forced her to an unwilling examination of conscience. She became afraid of death—she who had never feared it. The scar upon her brow had become to her a symbol of the mercy of God who had not suffered her to die in her rebellion.

Unknown to any one she had ridden that very day to a little mission in the hills, had sought out the priest and made her confession. It had not been easy; no part of it had been easy. The resolve and its achievement had cost her a great deal. She had not yet told Paul. The knowledge would give him great happiness, but she felt that she could not tell him yet. She was glad now that it was over.

Alix wandered on toward the procession of stones that marked the place once visited, as the Arabs say, by the wrath of Allah. She passed the two great cone-shaped rocks that are said to represent the guilty couple. In the moonlight they looked black and menacing, but the ivy that grew thickly upon them showed here and there furtive glimpses of silver. And far across the fields she could see the long procession of smaller stones, the guests, the children, all the people who had assisted at an act that had been detestable in the sight of Heaven, and that had been punished with such swift and awful retribution. Alix felt as if the spot must be haunted. Even now, in

the soft radiance of the Southern moonlight that bathed all things with its luminous magic, the place looked terrible and evil. Everywhere the boiling streams burst forth from the earth; seething, angry pools perpetually sent up their thin clouds of steam to make fairy wreaths for the olive trees. And across the evening air there came an odor of sulphur, suffocating and strong. The moonlight made strange figures like ghosts of all that white ascending steam.

She turned back and went down to a little glen to look at the waterfall where the hot water bubbled down over white, petrified rocks that looked like marble in the moonlight. From a little distance it had all the appearance of a great waterfall owing to the ridges formed in the rocks, but as she approached she could see that only tiny streams of hot water were pouring over that solid, gleaming surface. She stood under the olives watching it. The faint sound of falling water murmured across the silence of the African night. The haunting mystery of the scene possessed her. The spirit of the place seemed to her an evil one. She knew that the Arabs believed that djinns made their abode here, because of that ancient curse which had turned bride and bridegroom and guests alike to formless masses of stone, in the very hour of their triumph.

She sat down on a rock and watched the waterfall with fascinated eyes. It was getting late and she had come out to be alone and to make her decision, and she had not made it. Her heart was calling to her to make a great sacrifice,

and she was afraid to respond to it. She knew now that she loved Paul de Vernay, that she was glad she had promised to be his wife, that even if he never got better she would be perfectly happy in tending and nursing him. She did not wish to leave him, to go back to the desolate freedom of her desert life. She had put all that behind her when she turned her face toward Constantine, with the one definite resolve in her heart to become reconciled to the Church. And her promise to marry Paul had set the seal upon her complete renunciation of the old life. She would do in the future whatever he wished, whatever he willed. It would be easy, because she loved him now as she had never thought that she could love him. The doctors held out hope, too, of his recovery, although he was never likely to possess his old activity. His improvement since he came to Hammam-Meskoutine had surpassed all their expectations. And now in the midst of their happiness a new thing had come to torment Alix. That was the disappearance of David. She did not doubt that he had been stolen by the Arabs on account of his gifts. It would be to their advantage to spread wild rumors that he had been killed to avenge the death of Kadouijah which had indirectly lain at his door. But she was sure that he had not been killed, and she knew that if it were possible to find him she was the person to do it. She fought against this thought; she did not wish to leave Paul; he had been urging her to fix a date for their wedding as soon as possible after his arrival at Aïn-Safra. And it would make him

miserable if she were to go quite away. It was arranged that she should stay with Frances at Oued Zerqa for the present, while he remained with his brother. But now the time had come, and she felt that she ought to go in search of David. She must put on her burnous and turban—garments that she had hoped never to wear again—and go forth to the desert-ways upon a mission that spelled danger and, perhaps, death. She had a feeling that she had been given this opportunity of sacrifice to prove her submission to the Will of God; it was to form in a sense an atonement for her long and wicked mutiny. And in her search she knew that she could count upon the assistance of the powerful Arab Caïd, Ben-Mahmoud-bou-Ali, to help her. It was he who had killed her assailant, who had voluntarily undertaken to avenge the blow that had nearly ended her life. She put up her hand to feel the mark. Her fingers touched the broad and deep cicatrice that lay hidden under her ashen-blond hair. It would be with her always as a remembrance of those years of obstinate rebellion. It would be a sign of God's mercy in not permitting her to die in that rebellion. She thought of her confession made that day in the quiet little church in the hills. That had been her first decisive, deliberate step of submission. At the last moment she had longed to defer it for yet another day. Once her horse had stumbled and she had been nearly thrown. The incident had frightened her. She felt as if something might happen to her on the way, to prevent her from making her confession. It was with a feeling

of intense relief that she came in sight of the little white French village, with its spired church standing close to the road. She had left her horse at the *auberge* near by, and had entered the church. For more than an hour she had knelt there in prayer. Bitter tears of contrition fell from her eyes. For a little while she wept unrestrainedly. And at last she rose and went to fetch the priest. The way was so simple no one could guess how hard it might also be. The Church in her wisdom knew the most efficacious means of combating the tyranny of pride. The Sacrament of Penance safeguards her children from that sin by which the very angels fell.

And now she was called upon to make the sacrifice of her own happiness and go in search of her friend's child. She could not forego this hard and difficult duty; she felt that she owed it both to Frances and to David. When she went indoors that night her mind was made up. She knew that her decision would give Paul both anxiety and suffering. She was touched by his love that could forgive so much. But the thought of Frances prevailed—Frances, alone at Oued Zerqa, doubly bereft of both husband and child—Frances, to whom it was impossible to deny such help as she was able to give.

CHAPTER XXXIV

IN after days David Amory had but a confused remembrance of his long journey into the very heart of the Sahara.

He knew, however, that after leaving the motor in the middle of the night, when for a moment his eyes had rested upon a clear sky filled with clusters of stars brilliantly and wonderfully golden in their brightness, he had been transferred to a palanquin fastened upon the back of a camel, and within this closely curtained and airless horror he had spent long and weary hours. At night he was placed in a tent, and two men remained always with him through those hours when he lay sleepless and wondering if he could be anything but the victim of a prolonged and evil dream. With the first faint light of dawn he was bidden to rise, and another day was spent in the frightful atmosphere of the palanquin with its thick, striped curtains that hid the light of the sun from him, and condemned him to a stifling darkness. Sometimes the slow, swaying motion made him actually sick; sometimes it lulled him into a fitful, broken slumber, when he found himself back once more at Oued Zerqa with his mother.

It was for his mother alone that David grieved so bitterly. He had been torn from his home by a desperate enemy against whom his frail

strength was powerless. So much he knew, and he believed that death lay before him. In his hand he still clutched his rosary, and he had said it over and over again on each succeeding day until his mind had become completely absorbed by the contemplation of those holy Mysteries associated with each of the fifteen decades. He had prayed for suffering; he had offered his life very humbly for his father's repentance and conversion, but the thought of his mother's anguish filled him with sorrow. She must inevitably suffer through his sufferings. She would be quite alone. Perhaps he might never see her again. It was possible that she might never even hear of his death. He pictured her waiting at Oued Zerqa for his return, growing daily paler and thinner. The tragic loneliness of this figure, bereft alike of husband and of child, was such that David dared not let his mind dwell too much upon it.

Sometimes he thought of Alix's words: "Harm *can* happen to you in Africa." It seemed now as if she had had some premonition of this evil destiny which had overtaken him. She had warned him and he had tried to be more careful, not to go so far into the forest alone nor to stay out too late. He had kept to more frequented ways. But it had been of no avail; he had been captured under his mother's very roof; he had been borne away in the arms of men whose faces he could not see, and he had wondered why Beni had lain so still in the hall, making no effort to defend his master, and why Hafsi had not answered his one cry for help

which had been stifled by a cloth thrust roughly against his mouth. Then came the long, swift ride in the motor, when he had been held tightly in strong arms whose fierce clasp made him aware of his own helplessness.

As they journeyed still further south the weather became extremely hot, especially during the daytime, and the atmosphere of the palanquin became yet more unendurable. David suffered from fever, he became at times light-headed. All his limbs, especially his hands and feet, felt large and distorted, and he was conscious that at one time his voice never ceased talking. Sometimes a halt would be made and food and water were given to him. He could not eat, and the tepid water did little to quench his thirst. Then the journey would be resumed across that wide, trackless waste of sand under the burning, dazzling sky. In his intervals of delirium he often said his rosary, quite unconscious that he was doing so. He had lost count now of the nights and days. He wondered when the caravan would arrive at its destination. Beyond all the physical privations was the pain of hunger in his soul. He was starving for the Food which the church at Azeba had bestowed upon him daily. He felt forsaken. Those ineffable spiritual experiences which had once been his now seemed part of a vague, but splendid dream. Could the body die because the soul lacked sustenance? Or was this agony of suffering given to him to prove the strength of his faith? He thought of the martyr, Edward Amory, whose incorrupt hand was in the chapel

at Cold Mead, and prayed for a like courage.

One evening a halt was made and the curtains were drawn apart. David was lifted down and put on the ground. He was so weak he could hardly stand; the light, too, dazzled his eyes, accustomed for so long to the dim twilight of the palanquin. But when he was able to look up he saw before him what seemed to be an immense town, set in the midst of a spreading grove of palms. From the sea of white roofs one or two minarets sprang like graceful lilies on slender stems. Here and there the immense dome of a mosque stood up, its crude, solid whiteness heavily outlined against the sky. It was evening, and the sun had set behind the long, dark line of palm trees that lay like a deep blur against the flaming red and gold that spread like liquid color over the heavens. It seemed to David as if a violet veil presently descended over the houses and mosques, the domes and minarets, softening their crude, sharp whiteness, and lending a strange new loveliness to the wild desert that lay like a sea about that green island of shadowy palms. The darkness came rapidly, as it does in the south, almost as if the twilight were too beautiful to linger.

The tired camels were crouching on the sands; the mules and horses stood near, quiet and exhausted; a group of some twenty Arabs sat cross-legged, smoking the dark-colored Algerian cigarettes and carrying on a low conversation. Two men sat apart from the rest, and David had the feeling that they were watching him.

At last one of them rose and came to the spot where he was sitting and folded a white turban about his head. It seemed to David very hot and heavy. His own clothes were taken from him and he was clad as Arab boys are clad in a thin garment of yellow cotton, while a white burnous of some very softly woven material was hung round his shoulders. He made no attempt to resist this process of undressing and dressing. But as his clothes were being removed he made a sign, and putting his hand in the pocket of his coat he drew forth his rosary. A discussion then took place in rapid Arabic as to whether he should be permitted to keep this possession. Though he could not understand the words, he was quite sure that this was the substance of their conversation. The matter was, however, soon decided in his favor; he was permitted to retain his treasure. But the suspense of that moment when its fate hung in the balance had made his pulses throb painfully.

He was not lifted again into the palanquin, but this time he was set on the back of a mule which, from its gay trappings, was evidently the property of some Arab of wealth and importance. He leaned back against the peaked saddle and was glad of its support, for he was by this time completely exhausted, and faint from long sleeplessness. The caravan started, and they entered the town and went slowly through the narrow streets. David saw no Europeans. The place seemed to be inhabited only by Arabs. They thronged the streets and crowded the dark bazaars and cafés that were illuminated only by

dim flickering lamps. The scene that met his eyes seemed to belong to the fabulous histories of the "Thousand and One Nights." At last they stopped before a high iron gate set in a white wall, the top of which was fringed thickly with the dark, overhanging fronds of palm trees. The gate slid open, and David, with the two Arabs who had dressed him in his present clothes, entered a small garden heavily shadowed with trees. The rest of the Arabs did not accompany them. Across the garden they came to a courtyard with a square of grass and a fountain in the center. The arches and pillars of this patio were of black and white marble, the arches being decorated with fine blue tiles. It was, however, too dark for David to see these details; he could only observe that the house resembled a Moorish palace, and that the air was scented with the heavy perfume of jasmine and orange blossom. His two guides helped him to dismount; a small door painted bright blue and thickly studded with nails was opened, and David was pushed into the darkness that lay beyond it. He heard the door close with a dull sound, and knew that he had at last reached the prison destined to receive him.

David had been asleep for many hours when he became conscious of a continuous murmur of voices in the room. At first he could not remember in the least where he was, and his tired body seemed to feel still the perpetual jolting of the swaying palanquin in which he had spent so many disagreeable days. He opened his eyes.

He was lying upon a bed in the middle of a large, airy room which contained but little furniture beyond a large chest and some rugs spread out upon the floor. Over his bed there was an embroidered scroll worked with letters which he could not read, but he knew enough of Arab ways to guess that they formed a text from the Koran. There were three people in the room; he recognized two of them as the men who had watched over him so vigilantly, and who had arrayed him in Arab costume. He had never seen the third before, and his appearance was decidedly alarming. A tall, cruel-looking man no longer young, his beard was thickly sprinkled with gray, and his black and fierce eyes were shadowed with heavy, overhanging brows. He was magnificently dressed in a silken gandourah, elaborately embroidered with gold, and fastened with a diamond clasp.

He came up to the bed and looked intently at the boy. David's face was still flushed with slumber, and his eyes were bright as if the fever had not quite left him.

The Arab made a gesture, and in obedience to it David arose and slipped from the bed. He knelt down, crossed himself and said his morning ejaculation inaudibly:

"O Jesus, through the most pure heart of Mary, I offer Thee all the prayers, works, and sufferings of this day for all the intentions of Thy Divine Heart."

He rose from his knees. In his Arab costume he looked slim and fragile, and the radiant

beauty of his face was indescribable. He faced his captors with a fearless courage.

"Why have you brought me here?" he said in French.

The man in the silken gandourah made a step toward him.

"I am the Caïd," he said; "this is my palace, and I bid you welcome in the name of Allah. Be obedient—do all that you are told; learn what you are taught and no harm shall happen to you. You will be treated as my son. Honor shall be shown to you."

He spoke French fluently and well. Behind his smooth speech David detected something that was at once sinister and menacing.

His hand stole up and touched the Crucifix that was attached to his rosary, which last night, before going to sleep, he had hung around his neck. The Caïd watched him make this gesture, and his face grew stern. He turned to his two companions:

"He is young—he will learn. At first, have patience. Even the young cannot accustom themselves all at once to great changes."

He walked majestically out of the room.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE next few days passed uneventfully. Every morning the Caïd visited David for a short time, and spoke words of encouragement, impressing upon him the necessity of obedience. He was given food in abundance, far more, indeed, than he required. One or other of his guardians remained with him night and day. The attacks of fever had now diminished and his health improved. One morning the Caïd entered his room, accompanied by another man to whom David felt an instinctive aversion. He was lean and wizened, with a Jewish cast of countenance, and an expression that was at once cunning and cruel.

"This gentleman will be your tutor," said the Caïd; "he will instruct you in all things necessary for your education. He will teach you also to become a faithful son of the Prophet, and to forget those impious days when you worshiped images according to the custom of the French Roumi!"

David looked from one to the other. So the struggle was to begin. He had prayed for suffering, and where could this path lead him except to suffering, and, perhaps, death? He was silent.

"Hamid will begin your education to-day," continued the Caïd; "I hope you will profit by

his instruction. He has taught my own sons."

He left the room, and beckoned to the Arab who had guarded David to follow him. The boy was left alone with Hamid.

"It is the hour of morning prayer," said Hamid; "make the prostration. Thus."

He made the various movements, bowing, kneeling, prostrating himself until his forehead touched the ground. Then in a soft monotone he chanted:

Allah akbar
Ayah salat
Ayah fatah
Allah akbar
Shadu enna.

Then, rising, he bade David imitate him.

"I cannot pray—after this manner," said David; "I am a Christian."

He held his head proudly. Hamid laid a firm hand on his shoulder and with the other forced his head downward. Then he pushed the boy roughly upon his knees and held him in this posture. Lastly, he made him lie face forward on the ground until his forehead touched it. When David rose there was the mark of a bruise where his forehead had touched the ground, for the Arab had used considerable force and the floor was of marble.

"Say the words!"

David was silent. He could not prevent this man, whose hands were of iron, from making his body assume any position he chose, but nothing could force him to utter the words.

"The Caïd will be greatly displeased," he said. "Every one in the palace obeys him. It will be better for thee to obey."

"I am a prisoner here," said David, "I am the Caïd's prisoner—he can kill me if he chooses. But he cannot make me pray thus!"

"Use not harsh words. The palace is no prison. The Caïd has given orders that thou shouldst be treated as if thou wert his own son. He has given thee sweet foods to eat, a bed to lie upon; by his wish thou art dressed in silk and fine linen. But now—make thy prayer. I have taught the Koran to the Caïd's sons. They were quick to learn."

This went on for perhaps an hour, then the defeated Hamid withdrew, and the Arab guardian returned. This person never addressed David, but he brought him food at stated times and conducted him each morning to the bath.

Hamid sought his master. Probably he would be blamed for his failure, and his heart hardened against the boy who had defied him.

"Sidi—the boy is obstinate and pig-headed as are the English. He will not learn, he will not obey. Sidi, thy own sons were ever obedient and quick to learn; if they refused it was from childish idleness. But this one will only pray to the God of the Christians; he has his own chaplet which he recites each day, together with many other prayers. He prays as is the way of the French, continual prayers to her whom they call the Mother of God."

The Caïd's face looked stern. "Hamid, thou art not a child to let this boy conquer thee. Thou

must have patience again and again. If he is still obstinate to-morrow, withhold food from him till the evening."

Hamid carried out this program on the following day. David was still obstinate, though in his efforts to make him prostrate himself Hamid flung him with considerable violence to the ground. He rose, bruised and a little shaken. Hamid withdrew at last, and he was left without food until evening.

Before he went to bed that night a very small portion of food was brought to him. He felt weak, for he had not eaten anything for twenty-four hours. Perhaps they intended to starve him to death. He wondered a little why the Caïd had foregone his usual visit that day. He had seen no one but his two Arab guardians and Hamid.

In the morning his tormentor returned soon after the *muezzin* had called the faithful to prayer from the balcony of a neighboring minaret. David had heard the now familiar cry: "*Allah-ho akbar, ash-hado-an la Ilaha illal Laho Wa-ash-hado Anna Mohammadan-Rasul ullah. . . . Allah-ho-akbar. . . .*"

"Make the prostration," said Hamid, "and say after me the words of the prayer!"

"I have made my prayer," said David quickly.

He had, indeed, spent the whole night in prayer, and only toward morning had he fallen asleep, inexpressibly and deeply comforted. He had dreamed that Our Lady had come to him and touched him, bidding him have courage. She had come surrounded by an unearthly radi-

ance, and she had looked at him with pitying eyes. The dream or vision had given him new courage; he looked fearlessly at Hamid.

"I have prayed to Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ," he said simply.

Hamid struck him a cruel blow on the mouth.

"Blasphemer!" he said. "Say as I tell thee: There is no other God but Allah, and Mahomet is the Prophet of God."

"I will not say it. Never as long as I live! Tell your master so. He may keep me here until I die, but I will never pray thus!"

His eyes flamed and there was a ring of decision, of defiance, in his tone.

"The boy holds out," said Hamid.

"Has he had food?" said the Caïd.

"He had none all yesterday, Sidi, until the evening, and then but very little. Is he to have some to-day?"

"He is still obstinate?"

"He defies thee, Sidi." He repeated the boy's message. The Caïd, unaccustomed to rebellion, frowned.

"Well, we cannot starve him or he will die," he said, after a moment's reflection; "I have not run all the risks of bringing him here for nothing. Already there is a sick child waiting to be healed. Give the boy food. And then, if he is still obstinate, he must be beaten. Thou hast beaten my own sons, hast thou not, when their idleness or disobedience made it necessary?"

Hamid bowed in assent.

"Beat then this son of a Christian," said the

Caïd. "Give him one more trial. Then, if he is still obstinate——"

In the morning he returned to his task. Hamid felt that his own prestige was at stake; he had so far failed to conquer this child, and if he continued to fail he would earn his master's contempt.

"Prostrate thyself! Make the morning prayer."

David, unsustained by dreams or visions during the weary hours of the night, saw the whip in Hamid's hand with a sense of misgiving. He knew now that he would be beaten—perhaps cruelly beaten. He glanced for a moment at the window set rather high up in the wall. He could only see the top of a minaret thrust against that sky of pure blue flame. The slender tower with its pointed roof of emerald tiles flashed like a vividly colored jewel. He crossed himself and said his morning offering aloud, adding at the end, "I desire to offer all the sufferings of this day in union with the sufferings Thou didst endure for me on Calvary."

"Dost thou still refuse to prostrate thyself and pray?" asked Hamid.

"I refuse," said David.

"The Caïd hath given orders that thou shouldst be beaten for thine obstinacy. But if thou wilt say the prayer thou shalt be spared this punishment."

"I will not say it. Tell the Caïd that I will never say it!"

Hamid smiled a disagreeable and sinister smile. He knew the way to bring his refractory

pupil to terms. Had he not taught submission and obedience to the Caïd's own sons?

The sharp descent of the whip made the slight body quiver convulsively. David prayed. Surely God who had accounted him worthy to suffer for the Faith would also give him courage to endure it with fortitude. This thought thrilled through him with a joy that seemed for a moment to transcend the pain. It filled him with a passionate happiness. This fiery trial had been sent to prove his worthiness to be a soldier of Christ. He thought of the martyrs of Africa whose stories his mother had told him in the quiet days at Oued Zerqa; of the gently-born woman and her slave, flung to the wild beasts in the arena at Carthage; of St. Cyprian who went to his martyrdom with a *Deo gratias* that echoed across the centuries in triumphant thanksgiving; of St. Marius and St. Jacobus, the humble and obscure gardeners of Constantine, who endured hideous tortures before death came to end their sufferings. He clung to these memories and prayed that the flesh might not fail now. Perhaps Hamid had had orders to beat him to death. Then something very strange and curious happened which David could never afterward explain. He could hear the sound of the whip falling rhythmically, pitilessly, but it did not seem to touch him any more. He seemed suddenly very far away, as if he no longer inhabited that frail envelope of flesh with its horrible capacity for suffering. It was as if he had been caught up and removed from it upon a wave of advancing light, which was so dazzling

that it blotted out the very blue of the sky and the shining minaret that had been so sharply outlined against it. He became aware that he was no longer alone. He was supported and strengthened and immeasurably consoled. His dream came back to him, and in that light which so sustained him, almost as if it had been solid in its substance, he saw Our Lady as he had seen her in his dreams. It was as if she had come in response to the *Memorare* he had uttered when he felt the first strokes of Hamid's cruel whip. He was beyond any plane of physical suffering, and the light in which he was bathed touched him like a healing balm. He was sure that Our Lady was near him, though he could not see her face distinctly. She was in the attitude familiar to him since his earliest childhood, of the statue of the Immaculate Conception at Lourdes.

Something in the still, soundless passivity of his victim made Hamid fling aside his whip and bend down to look at the boy. He turned the face roughly toward him. The eyes were open, but the body was quite rigid; on his lips there was the patient, half-reluctant smile that is sometimes seen on the faces of the dead. For the moment Hamid feared that he had gone too far in his efforts to conquer this indomitable boy. He had a superstitious feeling, too, that he had been guarded in some way from the persistent blows. From first to last no sound had escaped from him. Hamid lifted him upon the bed not ungentlely, and went in search of his master.

The Caïd, alarmed by the information, ac-

accompanied Hamid to David's room. The boy was lying still, unconscious and rigid; his eyes were open, his lips parted and smiling. It was as if his soul, freed temporarily from its flesh prison, had gone forth victoriously upon some divine and spiritual adventure, very far from the ways of earth.

"Hush!" said the Caïd; "the spirit is coming back!"

A convulsive shudder passed through the whole frame; the limbs relaxed, a faint color came into the face blanched as death. David moved, looking from one to the other of his tormentors. Where had he been? Why did he feel no pain? His beautiful dream had not only sustained and consoled him; it had taken him in some mysterious manner beyond the regions of pain.

"Leave him there," said the Caïd; "next time I shall beat him myself, and then we shall see if he continues in his obstinate refusal to obey. . . ."

Hamid followed his master out of the room.

"Sidi," he said in an agitated whisper, "never again will I beat this son of the Roumi. I tell thee he is a marabout—he does not feel the blows!"

"He will feel those I shall give him," said the Caïd sternly.

For some days David was left alone. He saw no one but his two Arab guardians, and he wondered if Hamid had relinquished the task of his education. His little room in the palace

became infinitely dear to him; he no longer regarded it as a prison, since it was there that he had first tasted the sweets of an extraordinary liberty, a freedom that had had nothing to do with the body at all, and in which he had either dreamed a dream or seen a vision that had lifted him, as it seemed, out of the body into a flood of light that marvelously supported him. He had no fear now of anything which these men, so pitiless and so cruel, could do to him. They could only kill the body, that fragile prison of the soul from which he had been so wonderfully separated.

Nevertheless, his heart sank a little when a few days later the Caïd accompanied Hamid into his room. The Arab's face was sternly set, and in his hand he carried a leathern thong far more formidable than even Hamid's whip.

"Hamid tells me thou hast refused to learn, and thou hast refused to pray," said the Caïd. "Is that true?"

"I have prayed to Our Blessed Lord Jesus Christ," said the boy; "I cannot pray as you pray. I am a Catholic."

"Wilt thou not obey to save thyself the torment of being beaten?" said the Caïd.

"No," said David. "Nor to save myself from death," he added.

The Caïd lost his temper. He was totally unaccustomed to any manifestation of rebellion in his household; his methods of obtaining submission, if savage, were at least singularly successful, and it was impossible to suppose that they would fail now with this child.

But neither the first blow nor any of those that succeeded it evoked cry or protest from the rigid, passive figure.

At last Hamid crept forward and caught his master's arm.

"Sidi," he said, "did I not tell thee? He is a marabout—he does not feel thy blows. He is unconscious—he has passed beyond the regions of pain!"

The leathern thong fell from the Caïd's hand.

"Two such beatings should have killed one so weakly," he said, with an expression of surprise on his dark face. "He has been starved—he has been whipped. We must wait. Put him on the bed, Hamid."

"He is a marabout," said Hamid, touching the red coral charm which he wore suspended from his neck to ward off the evil eye. "It is true that his body quivers—that the blood flows. When our holy men stab themselves with knives no blood flows. But with these Christians it is different. Yet he felt no pain, Sidi; his gods heard him. His spirit left his body, and he was not sensible of any pain."

David opened his eyes and fixed them upon Hamid, who, uttering a cry of superstitious terror, fled from the room, holding his coral charm tightly between his fingers.

CHAPTER XXXVI

“**S**IDI, the young man Si-Aziz is here, and would speak with thee.”

The Caïd had returned from his evening ride in the desert, and as he entered the palace he was greeted by these words. In some surprise he went upstairs to the great saloon, furnished in the French manner, with its large arm-chairs and sofas upholstered in amber-colored silk, and innumerable tables. The floors were covered with splendid Persian carpets, and there were Oriental hangings screening the doors.

Alix was sitting upon a sofa. Her white turban was neatly folded about her head, making her face look smaller and paler than usual; a heavy white burnous enveloped her. She rose as the Caïd entered, and stood there, a slim, boyish-looking figure.

“I have come a long journey, Sidi,” she said, “and I am very weary. I would claim thy hospitality for at least one night.”

Ben-Mahmoud-bou-Ali confronted his young guest with an expression of some anxiety. He had heard many rumors of late concerning Alix Rezanoff, the chief of them being that she was about to marry a Frenchman and abandon her desert life.

“Thou art ever welcome, Si-Aziz,” he said,

with a low bow. "My wife will be enchanted to see thee again."

"I have come, too, to ask for thy help, Sidi," she said wearily.

"I am always ready to help thee, Si-Aziz. Have I not made thy blood-enemies mine own?"

"I remember with gratitude all that thou hast done for me, Sidi," said Alix.

"Si-Aziz, nothing can ever repay the service that thou didst render to one of mine," he answered.

"Thine art well now, I trust, Sidi? For when I passed through Biskra I heard that thy caravan had passed with one—in a palanquin, who was grievously sick."

The Arab cleared his throat. "The sickness has passed," he said; "the desert air works great cures." His features contracted slightly at the mention of the palanquin. But his dark face was curiously impassive and inscrutable.

"I would ask thee to tell me if—if any caravan has passed lately on its way to the south?" she said quietly.

"One passed recently, Si-Aziz, on its way to Timbuktu," he answered.

"With many persons?"

"There were three palanquins," said the Arab, lying fluently; "for the Caïd was removing thither with all his family. They did not tarry here, but hastened on their journey."

"Thou didst hear nothing of a Roumi child being with them?" said Alix.

His face and voice were quite controlled as he replied:

"I heard of no such thing, Si-Aziz; the Roumis do not permit their children to travel thus."

"A Roumi child is missing," said Alix, speaking very slowly and distinctly in Arabic. "He is the son of a great English chieftain, and his loss is occasioning much inquiry among the French, who would not have it said that their country is unsafe as a dwelling-place for the people of Europe."

The Arab bowed, looking but slightly interested in her recital.

"The desert is wide, Si-Aziz. If the boy is lost it will not be an easy task for the French to find him."

"I have not appealed to the French to help me, Ben-Mahmoud," she said; "I have come to thee—the most powerful of all the Caïds of the Sahara. I have come to seek thy help—to claim that promise thou didst once give me, to come always to my help in distress, because of the little service I once rendered to thee and thine!"

"This matter is different," said the Arab; "I promised only to avenge thine enemies. I never promised to assist thee in seeking children lost through the carelessness of their parents."

"Listen, Sidi," she said, "the child is dear to me. He is the son of a woman who is my friend. His loss is killing her—she mourns day and night. I have come to seek him—and to ask thy help, since I am powerless alone. Sidi—I have eaten thy salt—thou hast avenged the enemies who sought to kill me. Do not refuse thy help!"

"The French are thy friends now, Si-Aziz.

Thou wouldst leave, so I have been told, thy free desert life and marry a Frenchman?"

"That is true," said Alix, flushing; "but I shall never forget my Arab friends."

"But if this boy were found the French would endeavor to punish the thief who stole him?" said the Arab. "I cannot help thee in this matter. I cannot betray my own people. If it is true they have stolen this child I cannot help thee to find him."

"Sidi—if I can find him I would promise thee this—that never, never would I betray the name of the captor, nor the name of him who helped me to find him. Thou hast my word for it, Sidi. Nay more—I have with me a large sum of money to pay for his ransom."

The Arab was silent. David had been under his roof for a space of two months, and he had made no progress and given no sign of submission. From time to time he had been subjected to various kinds of punishment, but apart from the fact that his physical strength had perceptibly failed and weakened, there had been no change in him. And the arrival of Alix had caused the Caïd an ill-defined anxiety. He was perfectly aware that she went in and out of the Arab cafés, passing frequently for a man, and it was possible that she had heard something of his young prisoner. Nearly every one in the oasis knew of the arrival of this marvelous boy, whose gifts had been greatly exaggerated, and the inhabitants longed ardently and eagerly to see the new marabout. Rumors of his presence might well have reached Alix's ears. He began

to think that she was actually aware of David's presence in his palace. Two alternatives were open to him. One, which he considered with a curious, cold-blooded deliberation, was the murder of Alix herself, here in his palace. The deed could be done very swiftly and very quietly, and no one would be any the wiser. He rejected that alternative as impossible. He could not forget the services she had rendered to his little sick son. To her he owed the boy's life. To kill her would therefore be an outrage. And, besides, it might be too late to make such an act of any use. She had probably come here with a definite knowledge of David's whereabouts, and was deliberately making the offer of a ransom on behalf of the boy's people. She had assured him that no questions should be asked in the event of his helping her to discover David. He knew that he could trust her. But if anything happened to her, she would be traced to his palace and David would be found. The other alternative consisted in giving David up to her, in exchange for the promised ransom. He could not afford to quarrel with the French, and it seemed that this boy was not so obscure nor so friendless as he had been represented to be. Fate was fighting against him. He thought of David, from whom he had never been able to elicit a single cry. Hamid declared that he possessed the evil eye and would not even enter his room. The whole thing had been a failure, and he felt that he would be glad to embrace such a favorable opportunity of getting rid of him.

"Come with me," he said.

Alix followed him down a long, closed-in veranda, past the women's apartments, whose windows looking desert-wards were screened with the finest *meshrabiya*h woodwork; and down a second flight of stairs. Thence they mounted a small spiral stairway into a high, turret-like apartment. He pushed the door open and Alix saw, with a strange throb of joy, the boy David Amory sitting on a low chair beneath the high window, through which she could discern the slender minaret of a mosque.

"David," she said gently.

"Madame Rezanoff," he said. He rose, came up to her and kissed her hand.

She turned to the Caïd. "He may come with me?"

Ben-Mahmoud bowed. He seemed to see her kneeling again above his sick son, in that burning night when the child lay, as he had thought, dying of fever. "Take him, Si-Aziz," he said.

Alix put her arms round David's neck and kissed him. "Oh, my dear David—thank God—thank God!" she said. Her gray eyes were bright with tears; she held him to her breast.

The Caïd watched them. "Thy caravan shall start at dawn, Si-Aziz," he said. "Thy journey shall be well guarded. And I may count upon thy promise of silence—is it not so?"

"Upon my silence and my gratitude as long as I live, Sidi," she said.

She took off her turban, uncovering the thick, ashen-blond hair, so beautiful in its dusky fair-

ness, and handed him a little bag that lay concealed there in the linen folds.

At dawn on the following day she and David started on their long journey northward.

CHAPTER XXXVII

MANY times during that tedious homeward journey did Alix fear that David would never reach his destination alive. Weakened by all the suffering to which his body had been so remorselessly exposed, with a nervous system completely shattered, he seemed to be incapable of any sustained effort, and he was only able to travel by slow and easy stages. Alix had continually to remind him of his mother's anxiety, her ignorance of his safety, to induce him to persevere.

They reached Biskra toward the close of a beautiful December day, when the sun was setting in a strange glory of flaming red and gold behind the dark groves of palm trees. Alix took him immediately to the house of Elise de Vernay and sent a telegram to his mother. Frances arrived in Paul's motor on the following day. The meeting between the mother and son was tragic in its poignancy. Frances felt as if he had been given back to her from the dead. She had never dared to hope that she should ever see him again.

His mother's presence revived him, and he would hardly let her go out of his sight. She seemed an abiding security against those nervous terrors that so assailed him. To her he made

light of his sufferings, but his body told its own sad tale, and she knew that he would bear the cruel marks of his martyrdom to the day of his death.

When he was better they went back to Oued Zerqa, and Frances wrote to Stephen and told him that she was now considering the question of bringing David home to Cold Mead. She thought the change would prove beneficial to his health, and there seemed now little hope of hearing tidings of Aubrey. In any case, the boy now claimed her first solicitude; he had been sufficiently sacrificed.

The marriage of Paul and Alix took place in January. Paul had so far improved in health that he could now walk unaided by crutches, and the doctors were hopeful of his complete recovery in time. The wedding took place very quietly in the church at Azeba, the newly married pair leaving almost immediately for France, where they intended to make their home. Oued Zerqa seemed to settle down for the time being into its old uneventful quietness. The wet weather had set in, keeping Frances and David a good deal within their four walls. They saw little of Jean, who since his brother's departure came but rarely to see them.

Frances was anxious about David, but she hardly liked to take him back to Cold Mead in the middle of winter. She determined to wait a little, and see if the rest and quiet and peace would improve his health. Stephen had written, too, counseling delay for the same reason. She had not yet mentioned her proposed depar-

ture to Jean. It could make but little difference to him; she even felt that he would welcome the news. The nightmare of that dreadful two months' separation from David had caused her great suffering, and she looked haggard and thin, like some one who has passed through an acute grief. And Jean had shown her no increase of sympathy nor of friendliness during that time; he had perhaps held himself more aloof than usual. For the first time a kind of nostalgia seized her, and she longed for the familiar friendly faces of Stephen and Drayton and Gwendolyn Orme.

It was impossible to tell as yet how far David's experiences had definitely affected his health. He seemed to her weak and incapable of exertion. He still rode daily to Azeba whenever the weather permitted, but for the present she had begged him not to resume his studies. He obeyed her, and they continued to read a great many books together. The mother and son seemed closer to each other than they had ever been before. To her, and to her alone, had David ventured to relate the story of his dreams and experiences in the Caïd's palace. She believed them to have been veritable visions, and her heart thrilled at the thought of his steadfastness in the hour of bitter trial, which yet had been made so sweet for him.

One evening she had gone out into the garden to look at the mountains bathed in the golden light of sunset. Tam Gout raised his great purple spire, piercing the very sky. The rain had ceased, and everything looked green and re-

freshed. As she stood there on the terrace she heard a footstep beside her, and looking up with a little start she saw Jean de Vernay.

"I am sorry I startled you, madame," he said.

"You came so quietly—and I did not expect you. It is such a long time since you paid me a visit."

He said: "Is it long? What a beautiful evening! I hope we shall have no more rain for the present. The Blue River is in flood."

"Is it?" she said absently.

"How splendid Tam Gout looks to-night!" he said.

She echoed absently: "Splendid."

"How is David? M. le Curé said that he had not been in church the last few mornings."

"He is tired, but otherwise he seems pretty well. I asked him not to go to Mass—I was afraid of his crossing the river. I am afraid of everything for David now. I am getting a foolish and fussy old woman," and she laughed mirthlessly.

Jean did not smile. "Africa has taught you fear, then?" he said quietly.

"Fear—and so many things," she answered.

"Sad things, madame?"

"All life is sad, I think," she answered. "But I wanted to speak to you about David. I—I have been thinking it over, and I have made up my mind to take him home—back to England. I should like him to see a good doctor—to have some bracing air."

Jean looked at her, and there were hard lines about his mouth.

"When shall you go?"

"Oh, very soon, I think," said Frances; "perhaps early in February. We could stay a little in the south of France, in case it should be too cold in England."

"You are tired of Oued Zerqa?" he hazarded.

"I believe I am getting tired of it. I never wanted to go home before. But don't think, please, that I haven't been happy here. I was quite contented until—until that night I came home from Hammam-Meskoutine. That gave me a horror of Africa and the Arabs. I dare say I shall get over it in time. But for the present——"

"It has taught you, perhaps, to hate Africa?" he said in an icy tone.

"I do not really hate it. But there are things that frighten me—things that urge me to go away."

"I understand, madame," he said coldly; "that you do not intend to come back to Oued Zerqa?"

"I do not think that I shall come back for a long time—if ever," she answered, and as she said the words it seemed to her that something of the dazzling and beautiful brightness of the evening had passed out of it. She seemed to see again the gray hills around Cold Mead, could hear the wind sweeping desolately across those barren, sunless heights.

Jean's eyes—his sad, weary, disillusioned eyes—regarded her less coldly, less critically, she thought, than they had ever done before.

"Poor child," he said almost involuntarily;

"life is difficult, is it not? We see such a little way, and it is so dark and uncertain."

She felt that she could not bear his pity. She would have preferred that he should be harsh and bitter and disapproving; this new and strange tenderness unnerved her.

"Oh, I have courage still," she answered him; "I am learning to say *Mektoub*."

He came a step nearer; his face was pale and oddly emotional; his eyes burned with a flame that darkened them and yet gave them a peculiar radiance.

"Frances," he said, "I wish I could say to you: Do not go—remain at Oued Zerqa, let me teach you how kind Africa can be, let me teach you to forget her cruelty. But I can not say it, and if you can guess the reason, forgive me."

She was white to the lips; her dark eyes were hidden under the creamy lids with their heavy, silken fringes; she could not look at him; she could not speak.

"Can you guess?" he said.

"I think I can——"

"You have known, perhaps, a long time?"

"No—never until now——"

"Oh, my dear, my dear—if I could only entreat you to remain!" he said.

"You must not ask it."

"And you are not angry?"

"No—I am not angry."

"Oh, Frances," he said in his tender, weary voice, "I love you. I have loved you always, I think, from the day you first came to Oued

Zerqa. I loved you more each succeeding day. At first I would not acknowledge it to myself. I could only keep away from you—in your sorrow which cost me most of all—pretending I was your servant. But all the time——”

“Yes—all the time?” She wanted to hear him say the words. She thought the remembrance of them might fling a golden pattern over the gray future years without him—without him.

“All the time I loved you, Frances,” he said simply.

She made no answer. The sunset had painted the sky in soft, yet brilliant, tones of saffron and rose; against it the giant spire of Tam Gout stood darkly drawn. And below it the plain of Azeba was filled with a fading golden light. From the forest there came the melancholy piping of an Arab gezbah; far off a Kabyle dog barked; a voice chanted a low, monotonous song. These were the sounds with which Oued Zerqa would always remain inextricably associated in her mind.

“I dare not tell you what it cost me to keep away from here when David was missing,” he said; “but you will understand that I dared not come. There is nothing else to say—you are not free—we both—do we not?—think alike in these matters. But I am glad you came here. And if you should ever be free, I would teach you to love me too.”

Teach her? She could have laughed at the words, with a mocking, bitter laughter. He seemed to have lifted the curtain of obscurity

from her soul—to have shown her that his very voice, his presence, were love incarnate.

"There were times when I came very near to telling you the truth," he went on; "there was that night at Philippeville when you went to meet Josette. There was that other night when I came here to warn you about David. And there was that morning when I came, in answer to your message—from Hammam-Meskoutine—when David had been stolen. Those were the times when it was most difficult for me to keep silence. And now—good-by, madame."

Frances was very still. Her self-control depended now upon her silence. He must not know—he must not guess. She was there, she was near him; he loved her. When he took her hand in his she made no effort to release it; he kissed it twice and then let it drop.

She heard him move away—heard the steady, regular sound of his footsteps falling on the little path; she did not turn her head, but stood there gazing at the lovely scene before her.

David's voice interrupted her. "Mother—mother!"

"I am out here, David." She went slowly toward the house. The boy ran up to her and flung his arms round her neck. "Mother—are you ill? You look so white."

"No," she said, "I am quite well. Perhaps I am cold—the evenings are still chilly. Jean has been here, and I have been telling him that we are going back to England soon."

Frances sat alone that evening in the solitude

of her study. She had been occupying herself by taking some of the books from their shelves with a half-formed intention of packing them up. But the effort, slight though it had been, had tired her, and she had left them in two or three piles on the table. Anna must begin to pack them to-morrow. There was no need for any further delay. Perhaps in a few days now she would be able to arrange for their departure.

For it was Jean who had suddenly taught her the secret of her own heart. She loved him. She loved him so much that her love seemed suddenly to blot out all things; all the passionate sorrow and shame of the past; all the hopes and fears and perplexities that shrouded the future. It was the present that he so vividly illuminated. She saw in him the ideal, possessed of all those qualities, of strength, uprightness, honor, courage, in which Aubrey had been found so pitifully wanting. And she loved him. She said it twice over to herself, aloud and softly: "I love him—I love him——" The words brought a flame to her pale face. She looked back across more than fourteen years and saw herself a girl again, waiting for her lover, waiting for Aubrey who had shamed and deserted her. She remembered his touch, his kiss, the joy of it all, the strange happiness that seemed immortal. But it was not like this happiness; it had never pierced her as with a sword, so that she felt bruised and wounded from head to foot. She had been free then, and she had surrendered her freedom gladly to become Aubrey's wife. But now she was not free, and the chains that she

had fastened with her own hands were the chains that bound her now. She must not love Jean. It was a sin; all her training had taught her that. She remembered his own words: *You are not free; we both—do we not?—think alike in these matters.* So—she must not love him; she must never see him; she must leave Oued Zerqa—he must never know. She must hide the truth from him. If Aubrey came to Oued Zerqa he would not find her there; she would leave it for his sake, for her own sake—and because of Jean. She would go back to Cold Mead and forget this madness. It would be better for David, too. His nerves had suffered from all that he had undergone during his two months' captivity, and he would, perhaps, begin to forget it at Cold Mead. And if Aubrey came to Oued Zerqa he would learn where to find her. She envisaged the possibility of his return with indifference. He should not find her changed. She would try and love him the more because of this temporary disloyalty that had taken possession of her, and of which she was ashamed. Aubrey had always had the power to make her love him; even his disgrace had not deprived him of it. So in the future he would teach her again. He must never know why she had not continued to wait for him in Africa. David's health would be a sufficient excuse.

She drew the curtain and looked out into the heart of the African night. There was a moon, and the olive trees stood there in groves of shivering silver, and the forest beyond was dark with mystery. She could see the paths of the terrace

white in the moonlight, with the black shadows drawn quite sharply upon them. She could heard the low, plaintive sound of the gezbah stealing up from some Arab douar in the forest; its primitive cadences rose and fell with a kind of wild melancholy that seemed part of Africa, part of its tremendous and savage desolation. Frances listened to it, and to the song that presently accompanied it, with a mechanical attention. And she learned in that moment how passionately dear Oued Zerqa had become to her, so that she felt it would kill her to leave it. As one can only see the flame-like scarlet in an opal by holding it in a certain light, so one does not always recognize the fire that glows in a human joy, making it dear and beautiful and passionate. This fire of love colored everything anew, filling her African home with a golden glamour that transformed all things connected with it. It was less the place now whence her son had been stolen from her than the place where she had learned to love with all her heart. It was a joy so intense and so intimate that it produced suffering. She trembled under the stress of it. She began to see all the meaning that Oued Zerqa held for her, all that it signified, all that it would ever mean in her most passionate remembrance. And then other thoughts came to her, more serious thoughts, hard, strong, tyrannical. They showed her that because this love was so beautiful and so dangerous it must be destroyed. She must trample upon it and conquer it. It had come to birth only to die. It touched her whole life, all her thoughts, with

its fire; it wrapped Oued Zerqa in a new and vivid beauty, and she must turn away from it and learn to shut it out of her heart. She looked upon that beloved scene as one who is dying looks upon his dearest human possession, as if trying to imprint every detail upon his brain. Yet she knew that the corroding acid of pain would etch it deeply on her mind, as the acid bites the drawing on the etcher's plate rendering it a permanent picture.

Ever since she had come to Oued Zerqa the presence of Jean had always been associated with the daily events, great and small, of her life there. She remembered his coming, so suddenly and unexpectedly, to Philippeville that night, of his comforting with a strange tenderness the weeping and bereaved Josette, of his constant thought for herself because he was her servant—her servant. She thought of the day when he had given Beni to her—Beni who had met with an end at once heroic and tragic. At the thought of Beni the tears came slowly, unwillingly to her eyes. She had not wept, and she did not mean to weep—yet a sob broke from her. Love was driving her forth from her garden of Eden—an angel with a flaming sword.

She saw his face, somber, melancholy, with the dark, sad, stern eyes that to-night had been so tender, the thick hair, the shadows, the little lines, the hard mouth—she heard his voice, low, controlled; she felt the touch of his thin and strong hands. All her life she would try and forget him; forget the madness of the moment when she had stood there repeating to herself:

"I love him—I love him." All her life—the life spent at Cold Mead, with the cold and fierce winds beating desolately upon the Cotswolds, gray and arid as the days and years that stretched out indefinitely before her. Her courage ebbed at the thought. She felt wicked and ashamed; the very suggestion of evil hurt and wounded her, and made her feel wicked.

Jean, watching that night from Aïn-Safra, saw that it was long past midnight when the light in Frances's room was finally extinguished.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

“**I** HAVE brought you this letter, mother. I called at the post-office when I was in Azeba this morning.”

David gave his mother a letter. She had been kneeling before an open trunk in which she was putting a few things; now she rose and took the envelope with trembling fingers. She did not know the handwriting upon it; the postmark was Marseilles, and some instinct or presentiment warned her that it was either from Aubrey or that it contained news of him.

David went out of the room and softly closed the door. Lessons were in abeyance at the present moment, as they expected to leave the Blue River in a few days. But he had a great deal to see to, and was intent upon packing his own possessions to help his mother and Anna. And something in his mother's face at that moment had seemed to warn him that she wished to be alone.

He had noticed with concern that for some days past she had looked both ill and sad. Perhaps she was tired with all the preparations for their departure. Perhaps she dreaded the change that lay in front of her—the return to England and Cold Mead. David was too perfected now in detachment to care greatly where

he lived. But in spite of all things he loved his African home; the church at Azeba was especially dear to him, and the companionship of Jean was a thing that he knew he would miss. If he had been given his choice he would, perhaps, have chosen to remain in Africa until he was old enough to enter a religious order as a novice. That could not be for some years yet, and in the meantime he must spend his life, wherever he was, in due preparation for this event. He knew that his mother would not stand in his way. They were far too intimate now not to know each other's opinion about his future. They had often discussed it. Frances's only fear had been that Aubrey would return and oppose it, but his continued absence, the lack of any news of him or of his whereabouts, had greatly diminished this contingency. And since David's weeks of imprisonment in the Caïd's palace, since his sufferings endured there so bravely, Frances had resolved that she would permit no one to interfere with her son's vocation; he had earned the right to submit his destiny and career to the service of God to whom it seemed in a sense already consecrated.

Now, as she stood there holding the flimsy sheet in her hand, she saw beyond doubt that the writing inside was indeed Aubrey's. She went to the window and sat down beside it. At first she could not make out the words. Her hand shook so much that the paper trembled in her grasp. The letters seemed to dance before her eyes. And her whole mind was possessed by the one thought—that Aubrey was not dead, that he

had written to her, that perhaps even now he was on his way to Africa to seek her and his son.

"My darling Francie," the letter ran; "I am on my way to Oued Zerqa, and am waiting in Marseilles for a steamer to Africa. They are all very crowded just now, owing to the floods in France, and especially in Paris, where so many people were detained. But I am hoping to leave for one of the ports in a few days, and I will send you a telegram directly I land. I do not know how long I shall be able to stay with you, but I hope for some little time. You will not tell more people about my coming than is absolutely necessary as, of course, I have still to be very careful. Here I live in great dread of being recognized. But I am at the end of my tether, and I am longing to see you and David again. I feel that whatever the risks I must come. We have been apart so long, and I am sure it must be breaking your heart as it is breaking mine. Sometimes I wish I had chosen the other alternative and 'faced the music.' But each of us has a coward hidden somewhere within him, and mine was uppermost then. God bless you, my darling. Pray for me (as I am sure you do daily). I am coming to you with one of your prayers—you can guess which it is—answered. . . .

"Your own loving,
"A.")

Beneath his signature he had scribbled these lines:

"Dear, I look from my hiding-place—

Are you still so fair?—have you still the eyes?"

Frances let the letter slip from her nerveless fingers upon the floor. So he was coming back. . . . At first she could not realize it—that this event, for which she had prayed during so many sleepless nights of pitiful weeping, was really about to come to pass. In another week, if he had come, he would not have found her here. She began to see that it would have meant for him a cruel and sickening disappointment. He had been waiting for an opportunity to come to her. *"We have been apart so long, and I am sure it must be breaking your heart as it is breaking mine."* He was coming to Oued Zerqa—sure of her love—sure of her welcome. There was something in his letter that told her, too, that contrition had come to his heart. He was coming to her a changed and penitent Aubrey, whose faith in her abiding love had known no moment of doubt. She could hide her secret from him as she had hidden it from Jean. No one—least of all Jean himself—suspected it. They might be very happy here, and if it seemed necessary later on she could send David home to England. At present, to go away was quite out of the question. She must remain here and wait for Aubrey. She would tell Anna, and perhaps Hafsi, that Aubrey was coming. And Jean—she owed that to Jean. He could, if he wished, take a holiday and gather fresh materials for his book so long neglected. Perhaps he would go away for a time. That would make everything so much easier for them both. This

passing madness would soon die—he would learn to forget her. He would believe her to be happy and supremely contented; he knew nothing of this change that had come into her heart. And now he would never know. “If you should ever be free I would teach you to love me, too.” The words rang in her ears. She had no need of lessons in the art of loving Jean. She loved him to the destruction of her peace of mind. She put her hands over her eyes as if to shut out the thought of him that came so persistently. “I have been very wicked,” she said, “and now this is going to punish me.” Once she had longed so passionately for Aubrey’s return, and now the very thought of it filled her with a kind of shrinking fear. But surely, surely he would teach her to love him again. They had been so happy together in the past; it was impossible to think that they would not be happy together again. Had she not made her home here on purpose that he might come and find her? Had it not all been done for him? She had made it all so pretty on purpose, because he had said that he wished to find her at Oued Zerqa. “Oh, Aubrey,” she said aloud, “why didn’t you come long ago when I *did* want you and did love you?”

She stooped and picked up the letter, and read it again several times until she knew it by heart. Yes—there was no mistake; she had not been dreaming. Aubrey was alive and well; he was coming to her as soon as he could; he would remain with her as long as possible. She must give him the glad welcome he expected. He had

been so long alone, a solitary fugitive, and she had always been sheltered, she had had her boy's love to comfort her. And she had been surrounded, too, by that other love of which she had known nothing, but which must have shrouded her as with a warm, protecting mantle. Jean's love had always been hers, although she did not know it. She had been so rich, yet unsuspecting of her riches.

David came into the room. "Mother," he said; "Cousin Jean is here—he wishes to speak to you if you are able to see him."

"I will come," she said. She looked at him hesitatingly. Then she said quietly; "Come here, David—I have something to tell you."

He said quickly:

"Has anything happened, mother?"

She put her arm around him and kissed his forehead. "David—I have heard from Daddy—he is coming here—soon. We shall have to unpack again and put the things back in their places, so that the house may look nice. We must put off going to England for the present."

"That letter was from him?" said David; "that letter I brought you to-day?"

"Yes, dear," she answered.

"Will he be here soon?"

"As soon as he can get a cabin—the steamers are very crowded just now."

David looked at her wistfully. They had been very happy together; he wondered if his father's coming would make any difference. "You are very, *very* glad, mother?" he said.

"Why, David, of course I am glad," she said

almost reproachfully. "But you mustn't talk about his coming to any one except M. le Curé. Tell him that it is a secret. I shall tell Anna, and perhaps Hafsi. You see, he does not wish it to be known. It would not be safe."

"I understand, mother," he said.

"I will come down now and speak to M. de Vernay," she said.

David went back to his room and began to take the things out of the boxes in which he had packed them with much care. Frances found Jean alone in her study. She had not seen him since that evening last week when he had spoken those unforgettable words, and she shrank a little from the prospect of meeting him, and above all of telling him that Aubrey was on his way to Oued Zerqa.

"Good evening, madame," he said in his coldest voice. "I hope I am not disturbing you, but I have just had a letter from Paul, and he tells me that the floods are very serious now in France. The Seine is still rising, and in many places the railways are under water. I thought you had better know this so that you might arrange to travel home by way of Genoa, and wait there or at some other place in Italy until the weather improves. There are excellent steamers running between Algiers and Genoa."

"It was very kind of you to come and tell me this," she said; "but my plans are changed. I am not going to leave Oued Zerqa just yet!"

His face was set like a flint. "You are not going?" he said.

"No—I have had a letter from my husband—

from Aubrey. He is on his way. I had the letter this afternoon. I must wait here for him."

Jean did not speak and he betrayed no sign of emotion. But his eyes were fixed attentively upon Frances. She felt that he could read her very thoughts. And he must never know them!

"It was a great surprise to me," she went on, his very silence giving her self-confidence; "I had not had any news of him since before I left England. But he always said that he would come here if possible, and if it had not been for David I should not have thought of going away."

She paused a moment, wishing that he would speak.

"And I have thought it over," she went on eagerly; "and I hope you will think it well now to take a little holiday yourself. I shall not want guarding any more. I shall have Aubrey." She knew the words were cruel, and he winced a little, but she must not be too particular as to the methods she employed for screening her own feelings from him. It was necessary to be brutal and cruel to him, because her own sufferings at that moment seemed to be informed with the very refinement of agony. "And the estate can surely look after itself for a little while, or you might find some one to take your place temporarily."

"I think you are quite right," he answered slowly; "I will go away—for as long as you wish. I am your servant always, and perhaps you would even prefer that I should not ever come back.

I am, indeed, ready to give up my appointment here."

"Oh, I do not wish you to do that," said Frances; "but this seems such a good opportunity for you to take a little holiday. You have had such a strenuous time looking after David and me, and we have given you so much trouble and anxiety." She spoke the words lightly, and her eyes met his fearlessly.

"Very well, madame, I will take a holiday."

"Only," she went on, "perhaps you would stay until Aubrey comes? He might be displeased if you went away before—he might even think you did not wish to meet him. It would hurt his feelings. I hope I am not asking too much?"

"I will stay—until he comes," said Jean quietly.

"I do not know yet which day it will be," she went on, "but I suppose I shall have a telegram. He does not say which port he will come to. I hope he will let me know, so that I may go and meet him."

Her eyes shone with excitement; her cheeks were flushed. Jean, entirely mistaking the cause of her emotion, thought that she looked like a girl again—a girl, young and happy, and waiting for her lover long delayed.

"You will perhaps let me know when you hear?" he said.

"Yes—I will let you know at once," she answered.

"Good-by, madame."

"Good-by, M. de Vernay."

When he had gone she went to find Anna to tell her the news. "We must rearrange everything, Anna. I want the house to look as pretty as possible," she said. "And I can not make any plans for the future now. We shall remain here, of course, for the present." She was very busy helping Anna to rearrange the house during the rest of the day, and was thankful to have this active occupation. It prevented her from dwelling too much upon Jean. She was glad that she had seen him again; that she had been able to speak to him as she had done. Perhaps he had gone away thinking that she was angry with him; she almost hoped that this was the case. She had been purposely cruel for fear he should guess the secret that she was hiding from him—the secret that no one must ever know.

That evening she received a telegram from Aubrey. "Am leaving for Algiers to-morrow in the *Général Chanzy*.—AUBREY." So in less than three days she would see him again. She made up her mind to go and meet him at Constantine, and travel back with him to Oued Zerqa.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A WILD storm raged in the Mediterranean and blew savagely across the African Tell, strewing its unchecked course with the evidences of its fierce fury. All the rivers were in flood, and many ancient trees that for generations had been the pride and glory of the forest had been uprooted by the gale, and lay prone amid the withered spires of last year's asphodels. For two days the storm continued unabated. The house at Oued Zerqa rocked until Frances could scarcely believe that it would be able to stand against that savage onslaught, but must crumble like a child's house of cards. She could not sleep. The sound of that moaning, crying wind tormented her. It shook the fragile casements and sang wild melodies from the tall olive and eucalyptus trees; at times it seemed to possess a human voice, raised in protest against the infliction of some long and slow agony. The rain beat heavily against the windows; she could hear it splashing among the trees. The murmur of the Blue River rushing valleyward made itself heard distinctly, even above the loud voice of the storm. She lay awake filled with fear for that steamer, even now making her way southward in the teeth of the gale, battling against that wild and tempestuous sea.

The fierce voice of the storm, the howling wind, the cry of the river seemed to fill the whole world with a strange passionate symphony of sound. There was something terrible and menacing in it, as if it were demanding of earth and sea the victims that it desired to destroy and slay. Frances trembled as she lay in bed. If Aubrey should still be on the sea to-night! She feared that the boat could hardly have reached Algiers; it must have been considerably delayed by the storm.

That day passed without bringing her any news of her husband. Jean had told her that it would be time for her to start when she received the promised telegram from Algiers, and even then she would arrive in Constantine many hours before he could possibly do so. Her little trunk was packed; she was quite ready for the journey. She was going alone, and David was to stay that one night with Jean at Aïn-Safra.

She wandered restlessly about the house. The plain of Azeba, as well as all the mountains surrounding it, were completely blotted out by the clouds of heavy rain swept across them by that strong wind. She could scarcely see anything beyond the garden. The ragged eucalyptus trees, which reminded her always of dejected birds with drooping and ruffled plumage, stood up like shadowy gray sentinels. The flowers and plants in the garden were battered to the ground. It seemed as if some strong destroying hand had touched everything to its infinite hurt.

Presently she heard the sound of horses' hoofs

in the road below. Perhaps Jean had come to pay her a visit; perhaps he had news of the *Général Chanzy*; he had promised to go in to Azeba, if possible, to telephone to the steamship company, and ascertain if she had arrived, so David had told her. She herself had not seen Jean since the day when she had told him that Aubrey was on his way to Oued Zerqa.

He came up to the house and rang the bell. He wore a long mackintosh coat which enveloped him completely. When Hafsi opened the door to him, a wild gust of wind and rain blew into the hall. Under his cap his hair and face were wet. Water ran down his boots, and his gloves were stiffened with rain. Frances came out into the hall. She was horrified to see him in such a plight.

"Oh, you should not have come out on such a day!" she said. "It is such terrible weather. Last night I could not sleep for the storm."

"I have been down to Azeba," he answered, shaking his gloves; his wet boots had made dark marks on the red tiles of the hall, "to telephone to the Compagnie Générale's office at Philippeville. They have had no news of the *Chanzy*. It is scarcely to be wondered at, for the storm has been the worst experienced for many years, and it is probable she has put in somewhere for safety."

"Won't you come in?" said Frances, opening the door of her sitting-room. "Come and dry your feet by the fire. I am sure you must be wet through!"

"I am really not fit to come in, madame. I

had better go back at once to Aïn-Safra. This is not very good weather for you to travel to Constantine."

"But perhaps there will be no necessity to start to-day," she said. "If the *Chanzy* gets in to-night I can leave by the early train to-morrow morning. Perhaps the weather will have cleared by then."

"I hope that may be the case," said Jean quietly. He looked at her with some curiosity. Her face betrayed no signs of anxiety. She had not slept on account of the storm, but she seemed to have no fears concerning Aubrey's safety. Perhaps she did not realize that already the *Chanzy* was considerably overdue.

"It may be," he said slowly, "that you will have to give up going to Constantine. I must find out if the railway line has suffered damage."

He moved a step toward the door. Frances did not try and detain him. So cold and impassive was his manner that she could hardly believe now that he loved her—that he had ever told her so—that he had ever permitted her that one glimpse of his heart. His only care seemed to be that he should serve her, humbly and faithfully, in small things, putting himself on one side, as, indeed, he had done ever since she first came to Oued Zerqa.

"Please do not make any more journeys for me to-day," she said; "the weather is too bad. Aubrey will be sure to send me a telegram when he gets to Algiers."

Jean went out and strode toward Aïn-Safra in the teeth of the gale. Damage and destruc-

tion lay all along his path; he saw the fine trees uprooted as if they had been fragile twigs; their torn branches lay upon the grass. The wind blew in his face; the rain fell heavily in sharp squalls. Once or twice he was almost lifted off his feet. Clouds had descended over the mountains and obscured the plain. He stumbled forward, and almost fell over the immense trunk of an uprooted olive tree, once a splendid patriarch of the forest, now a helpless victim of the storm.

And he had left Oued Zerqa without having had the courage to tell Mrs. Amory that there was considerable anxiety in Philippeville as to the fate of the *Général Chanzy*.

Frances went back to the fire and took up a book. But she could not read. The sound of the storm disturbed and unsettled her. Its violence seemed to increase rather than to diminish as the hours went on. During the last two days she had been very busy helping Anna to rearrange the house. She wanted it to look especially pretty when Aubrey came; she wished him to feel that he was welcome and his house made ready for him. She wondered idly if he would be greatly changed. He had been a wanderer, a fugitive, so long, an Ishmael with his hand against every man. She must teach him to forget the unhappiness, the loneliness of those years. Almost all the dread of meeting him had slipped from her. She could think of it now quite calmly. She had put the thought of Jean resolutely from her. It must never again invade her heart with that emotion so charged with des-

pair and pain that she could scarcely recognize it as love. His love was a gift that she dared not receive, a forbidden fruit of the tree of Death.

The olive logs upon the hearth gave forth a faint aroma; they burned with a bright and vivid flame. She watched them idly. To-morrow perhaps, certainly the day after, Aubrey would be sitting here with her. There would be so much to talk about, so much to tell each other. Of David's future it would not perhaps be necessary to speak just yet. She had an idea that upon this subject Aubrey would not be sympathetic. From all her knowledge of him she felt that he would dislike the idea of his only son entering a Religious order, especially at an early age. There was Cold Mead to be considered; there were, besides, innumerable other reasons militating against the project. But Frances knew in her heart that nothing could change David's decision. Her boy's soul was too close to God in a strange mystic union she but imperfectly comprehended. The sufferings he had endured for the Faith in the Caïd's palace had in a sense consecrated him to that service to which he had then pledged himself. She saw that since then, while his bodily health had weakened, the boy's fervor had sensibly increased. After he had emerged from that fiery trial of the flesh, she saw that it had set the seal upon his vocation. How far that strange ecstasy had spared him she did not know, but she knew that before it had intervened he had tasted something of the sharpness of death; he had almost earned his

right to a martyr's crown. Body and soul were alike vowed to the service of the Master in whose Name David had endured so much.

The day wore on. Jean did not come back. At evening the storm became less violent; a gleam of sunshine fell upon the plain, chasing the thick bank of cloud before it. A glimmer of young green was visible, and the mountains showed their outlines in a faint, watery silhouette. Frances went to bed early, thinking she might have to make a start by the first train.

CHAPTER XL

OVERHEAD the sky was of the warm, brilliant blue of an African spring, but toward the horizon it was spread thickly with creamy banks of cloud that floated lazily across the blue of the distant mountains that lay between Azeba and the sea.

This morning Frances could see the plain quite clearly with its wide spreading fields of young wheat, the warm brown of the vineyards as yet untouched by the faint gold of opening buds, and beyond these the low hills green with the brushwood that clothed them as with a soft garment.

The sun shone on the green pastures, and made them look like patches of strewn emerald dividing upon the hills the gray tracts of brushwood. A glimmer of gold showed here and there where the gorse was beginning to bloom. The pink foam of the almond trees pushed its pure, delicate color against the blue of the sky. Beyond the eucalyptus trees on the other side of the garden she could see the forest with its groves of cork and olive trees, gray-green and silver in a new and fresh splendor. The faint purple of the mountains was darkened with pilgrim shadows as the clouds swept over them, drifting past like thin smoke. She could hear the mur-

mur of the Blue River, swollen by the heavy rain, as it sped a sullen and swift stream toward those fiercer waters that in their tempestuous fury had so delayed Aubrey upon his homeward way.

Her ear was strained to catch the sound of approaching horses' hoofs. Jean was already late. She had been expecting him for the last two hours. There was still, however, plenty of time for her to catch the afternoon train for Azeba to Constantine.

In the road below she could see the figure of some one riding. She felt sure that it must be Jean, and wondered a little why he was coming from the direction of Azeba instead of along the upper road that ran between Oued Zerqa and Ain-Safra. He was coming very quickly. Evidently he had news to bring—he had come to tell her of the arrival of the *Chanzy*. Perhaps he would stay to breakfast and drive her afterward to the station. David should come with them. While she was rapidly evolving these plans, she saw him riding quickly up the short cut that lay steeply between the road and the house. He was coming like some one who had not a moment to lose.

In a few moments he was standing beside her on the terrace, and his eyes, sad, wistful, tender, were on her face. Her own fell before that look of fierce appeal.

"Is there no news yet?" she said, and for the first time a strange anxiety possessed her; she wondered what he had come to say.

"There is news, madame," he said. He spoke with an effort.

"Has the *Chanzy* arrived?" she said eagerly.

"No," he said, "she has not arrived."

"Do they think she will be in to-day?"

"No, madame—not to-day."

Now he was standing before her he felt the impossibility of telling her the whole brutal truth, that not to-day nor any other day as long as the world lasted would the *Général Chanzy* reach an earthly haven.

"You are tired," said Frances, suddenly looking up at his pale face; "I am afraid you have come too quickly. You have had that long ride into Azeba. Will you not come indoors and sit down, and tell me all that you have heard?"

She led the way, and he followed her mechanically. He thought he had never before seen her look so beautiful, with the sun shining on her dark hair illumining its hidden gold. The soft color came and went in her cheeks; her dark eyes shone with a tender light. She was happy, he told himself, because she was waiting for the man she loved. The man who had brought shame and disgrace upon his house and name. *The man who would never come.*

The study was full of flowers. Frances had gone out early to gather all she could find that had been spared by that savage storm. He remembered noticing in particular the vivid effect of a bowl of daffodils placed near the window, where the sunshine caressed them into a new glory of gold. There was a faint scent of violets.

"You will stay to breakfast, will you not?" she said. "And I thought, perhaps, you would

drive me and David down to the station. I shall leave for Constantine this afternoon. I am so afraid of not being there in time. You could forward any telegram that came."

"No—madame. Do not go to Constantine. It would be better to wait," he assured her in tones that were almost eager.

"But if he should arrive to-night in time to catch the night mail from Algiers to Constantine, I could not get there in time to meet him," she said.

"He will not arrive to-night," said Jean heavily, and now his eyes dared not meet hers; "there is no chance of it. I heard this morning that there was no chance of it."

"What do you mean?" Her fears were at last aroused. "What have you heard? What are you trying to tell me? Has anything happened to the *Chanzy*?"

"Yes," he said, "the boat has been wrecked off Majorca. Only one man was saved—he was not found until yesterday. That is why nothing was known."

"You say," she said pitifully, "that only one man was saved. It was not——?"

"It was not Aubrey," he said quietly.

She leaned back in her chair and hid her face in her hands. The cry that escaped from her was as the cry of some feeble, young, wounded animal. Jean thought that he should never forget the sound. It pierced him to the heart.

"Aubrey is drowned?" she said at last. "Is that what you have come to tell me?" She

looked at him now with eyes that were wide with horror.

"The *Chanzy* is a total wreck. She was driven on to the rocks by the gale. I have inquired—and there is no reason to doubt but that a M. Aubrey who booked his passage at the last moment was on board the vessel."

He put his hand on her shoulder with a gesture conveying both pity and remorse. How far she needed pity he could not tell, but he believed that she had adored her husband in spite of all things. She had never spoken of it, but then she had very seldom spoken to him of Aubrey. His own remorse for the words he had uttered but a few days ago filled him to the very foundations of his being.

He did not go away. She was alone, companionless. She had the task before her of telling David of his father's death. And she knew that he—Jean—loved her. He waited for her to speak. Then he realized that Aubrey still stood between them, perhaps eternally. He had never known the man who had brought love and happiness, and then disgrace and shame into her life. His hands had been prodigal of gifts—gifts both good and bad. And they were stained hands that should never have touched the whiteness of her. Jean could see the tears falling through her pale fingers, he could hear the sound of her ill-suppressed sobbing. She was weeping for Aubrey; even in death he still possessed the power to make her suffer. A jealous rage suddenly filled the heart of Jean, as he thought of those long years in which this

man had loved and cherished and consoled Frances, for the years in which she had been his wife, for the child that had been born of their union. It was as if he realized these things for the first time. Frances had been so solitary here, a deserted wife with only David to convey any significance to past days. And because she was not free, and because she was alone, Jean had trampled on every symptom of his growing love for her—the love that had awakened at first sight of her sad loveliness, her helplessness, her solitude. Yes, he had trampled savagely on his own heart until that day when he had felt that he must speak to her or die. And she had been kind and gentle to him then as always. Not a word of reproach, nor of anger. Now everything had been swept away; between herself and him there lay the shattered walls of all the obstacles that had so arbitrarily divided them. Was this ghost—this thin shadow of a man dead and drowned—to stand as an eternal barrier between them? Visions of drowned men with seaweed clinging about them, disfigured, mutilated by rock and wave and nameless horrors of the deep, rose before his eyes.

Then self-reproach hurled its darts anew upon him. Why had he ever told her that he loved her? He would represent to her all that was disloyal to the dead man. He could not attempt to speak words of consolation. Aubrey's death had set her free—and had he not said that once free he would teach her to love him? Idle boast—since this dead man stood between them—a shadowy, protesting presence,

invested, too, with the strange dignity that Death can bestow upon the meanest of his victims.

He crept softly out of the room and left her alone. He had no word of consolation nor of sorrow to offer her, he had forfeited the right to console and comfort her.

CHAPTER XLI

IT seemed to Frances that many, many hours must have passed over her head since she had heard Jean's retreating footsteps dying away on the path beyond her window, before she nerved herself to rise and go in search of David. And during that time she felt as if she had lived through an æon of emotion and anguish.

Aubrey was dead. He would never come back. That was what Jean had come to tell her. He had broken the news to her as gently as he could, and she was aware that the task had been to him one of an almost impossible difficulty. There was no one else to do it; he had not been able to shirk it. And having done it he had gone away; he had not ventured to utter a single word of sympathy or of consolation. He had left her alone to try and realize her loss. *Aubrey was dead.* She said the words over and over again to herself, but they seemed to convey no meaning. He would never come back; he would never seek her now at Oued Zerqa, in the home she had prepared for him. The door which had always been kept open night and day, lest he should return, could now be closed always. That summer morning when she had motored to the station with him from Cold Mead, and had said good-by to him in the train,

had been their final farewell. She had not imagined then that they would be parted for more than two or three days at the outside. Instead, the best part of two years had passed, and until less than a week ago there had been no word of him during all that time. Then had come the first breaking of that heavy, bitter, desolating silence. And now had begun a new silence, more complete, more permanent—a silence that could never be broken.

She could see him again bending from the train to kiss her; she could almost feel the touch of his lips on hers, the touch of his hand on hers, in that embrace which was the last. She was glad to think that at that moment she had loved him with all the love of her heart. She had had no hard thoughts of him, despite the wreck and ruin he had wrought, the shame with which he had enveloped both wife and child. His bright, hard eyes had looked into hers with the old adoration. For thirteen years she had been his; she had been completely possessed by him; surrender to his will had been rendered easy by love. And then without a word of warning even to her, he had gone away—whither she would never now know—and left her.

She saw the months at Oued Zerqa pass before her, too, in a rapid phantasmagoria of scenes and pictures. Sad, lonely months when she had come with her boy to make a new life there, still in obedience to Aubrey's wish. He could still control her, still order the manner of her life. She had settled here because he wished

it. Others had pointed out the unwisdom of the step. At home, there had been Stephen who had tried to dissuade her from it; here in Africa there had been Elise de Vernay, Alix Rezanoff, even Jean himself, all counseling her to return to England. She had not done so; she had obeyed Aubrey obstinately; she had planned for him, waited for him. There had never been any fugitive or chance thought of disloyalty. If he had been able to look into her heart he could have seen it empty of all things, of all emotions, save that abiding love for him, a love charged with sorrow and sadness, but still inevitably and changelessly his.

And at this point Frances did not spare herself. She knew the moment when the change had come; she knew the day and the hour. It was that night when she had returned alone from Hammam-Meskoutine, and found her home ravished and her boy stolen from her. She knew that her heart had gone out to Jean then in an instant of agonized appeal. It was to him she looked for help. It was Jean's presence that she desired. The figure of Aubrey was only then a far-off, shadowy phantom, without substance, incapable of coming to her assistance. It was to Jean she sent her message praying for his help; it was to Jean that she had turned in that hour of hopeless sorrow and bereavement. At the time she had tried honestly and faithfully to put this knowledge from her, recognizing it as a first symptom of disloyalty to her husband. Now in her self-searchings she saw that even then she had given to Jean the trust

and confidence that were Aubrey's by right. They had been with her the precursors of love. She was standing again on the terrace, and the roses were clambering over the pergola, and the violets were giving forth their morning incense of fragrance and perfume, and Jean was coming up the path toward her, and the sunshine was hurting her eyes, heavy with sleeplessness, and making his figure dim and blurred to her vision. She had been so thankful to see him then that she could have fallen upon her knees at his feet in gratitude. And he had not failed her. He had chosen to be her servant because he could not be anything nearer or dearer to her. It was only thus that he could serve her. And had he not told her afterward in that one moment of revelation, that of all times he had found it most difficult then to keep silence—to refrain from telling her of his love?

She had tried to put this love away from her, she had tried not to admit it into her heart, but always it crept back like a crying, restless child that seeks its mother in defiance of her wishes. She had tried to be loyal, to be scrupulously faithful to Aubrey in all her thoughts. And it had not been difficult until the day when Jean had spoken to her, and told her that he loved her, and showed her for all time that glimpse of his heart. She blamed herself because she had permitted him to speak these words; she had made no effort to check or silence him; she had listened to the words that appeased the hunger of her own heart. She had even encouraged him to speak because she wished to hear; she

wished to know, to have the comfort of that knowledge in the days when she would be deprived of the sight of his face, of the sound of his voice. He had made her realize the depth of her own love for him; she could never again deny its existence; she could only pray that she might have the strength to hide it from him.

And now Aubrey's death had flung wide the shut gates and released her. It had made her free—free to love Jean. But sometimes the way to the heart's desire is a difficult, painful way, costing too much, levying too heavy a toll, and it was thus that she now regarded the fact of her freedom. It seemed a frightful thing, bought with so heavy a price that now the gift was hers she dared not look upon it, but hid her eyes. Aubrey was dead, but his hands still held her in a cruel and merciless grasp, and she felt that she dared not take this, his last gift to her—the gift of her freedom.

She rose at last and went in search of David, to whom the news of his father's death must now be told. At the sight of him her tears were released; she burst into a passion of weeping. She put her arms round his neck and clung to him, kissing him.

"Oh, David," she said, "Jean has been to tell me—that the *Chanzy* has been wrecked. And——" She could get no further. But she saw in his eyes that he understood.

He grew very white. "Daddy——?" he said under his breath.

"Yes—he has been drowned."

They knelt down and said a *De Profundis* for

the repose of his soul. Until now she had not prayed. She could hear David sobbing at her side, uttering the words with difficulty. She put out her hand and clasped his. He was still the dearest thing in the world to her. And it was Aubrey who had given him to her.

She forgot then that she had ever had anything to forgive him; she remembered only the first gifts of love and happiness that she had received at his hands.

CHAPTER XLII

DURING the days that immediately followed the news of the fate of the *Général Chanzy* the little household at Oued Zerqa was hushed into a new and deep silence. It was as if death had entered its doors, the doors that were now closed, the doors that would never be opened to admit Aubrey, with his light footstep, his gay laugh.

Frances Amory lay very ill, and for many days and weeks it was feared that Death would actually enter those doors and demand his unreluctant victim.

As she grew better she became aware that she was not alone, that kind faces watched over her, and quiet figures moved in and out of her darkened room. For a little while there was Elise de Vernay, summoned hastily by a telegram from Jean, who had taken sudden fright at the doctor's alarming report of his patient's condition; and when she had gone it was only to yield her place as nurse to Gwendolyn Orme, who had come as quickly as possible from England to be with her sister-in-law.

But Jean himself never came there. From the day on which he had brought her the news of Aubrey's death she had not seen him. She had fallen ill very suddenly, from shock, the doc-

tor said, and she must be kept quite free from any further emotion or excitement. She passed from one fainting fit to another, and her heart was in an enfeebled condition in consequence. Jean came daily to Oued Zerqa, interviewed Anna and the doctor and David, ordered all things that were necessary, and finally sent for Elise to come to the rescue.

Frances did not ask to see Jean. Some day, in the far, far future, when she felt stronger, she would send him a message asking him to come. She did not know it, but it was this frail link that bound her to a world which had given her so much of both joy and pain, success and failure; it was this thought which seemed to hold her back when death came, as sometimes, a little too near.

Spring had come once more to the Tell, painting her woods and fields and mountains with a wilderness of bright blossom. In the plain the vineyards were strewn with the fragile, delicate gold of opening leaves. The swallows had come and were circling round the house, uttering their short, sharp cries as if of dismay. A stork flew past with flap of great black and silver wings across the cornfields. The haunting melody of Arab flute and song sounded from the pastures in the forest. All the trees that shaded the long, white, dusty road to Azeba were again gay with their fresh spring foliage, plume-like, vividly green. The Judas trees hung out their bright purple blossoms, and the close-growing centaury embroidered bank and hedge-row and forest with its carpet of rose-pink

flowers. The asphodels looked like dancing stars in the sunlight as the wind swept past them.

One day, early in May, Frances came out on the terrace leaning on David's shoulder. She was still very weak and delicate after her long illness. She was still suffering from the effects of that violent nervous prostration. During the last few months she had endured two severe shocks, and Aubrey's death following so soon after the capture of David had been the means of bringing her down almost to the very gates of death.

Now she had come back with evident reluctance to a pale semblance of life and health. This was her first day out of doors, and a long chair had been placed for her in the garden under the thick shade of the orange trees. Their blossoms filled the air with perfume, and the wind that brought a little color to her pale face was soft as a caress. The weather was brilliantly fine and warm, and the dark blue sky was clear of cloud. The bougainvillea tossed its crimson garlands across the arches and pillars of the veranda. The glimmer of young green in the fields, the sharp outlines of the mountains grouped around the spire of Tam Gout, the far-off town of Azeba lying in the cup of the plain—seemed to smile a welcome upon her. It was all so beautiful, so familiar. She was sorry to think that in a few days she would have to leave her African home and its blossoming garden and return to England. Gwendolyn had made all arrangements for the journey, and did not

wish it to be delayed any longer now that Frances was sufficiently recovered to be able to travel.

David put a light rug over his mother's recumbent form and set a little table with books on it by her side. He sat down near her and began to read. They had not been there very long when Lady Orme came out to join them.

"You are not too hot out here, Frances?" she asked.

"No—I am enjoying the sunshine," said Frances, with a smile; "it is such a lovely day, isn't it, Gwen? I am quite sorry to think we are leaving it all so soon."

Gwendolyn had never imagined that Frances could possibly feel any affection for the place of her exile. She stared at her in astonishment.

"It is all very well, Frances, but you must have been literally bored to death here!" she said in her charming voice; "no one to speak to except that silent Frenchman who never answers. And miles from a church, too! How could you endure it—especially after your London life?"

"I was not bored," Frances confessed. "I wasn't unhappy here up till the time David was taken away. I loved the forests, you see, when I was a little girl. Do you really think it is such a dreadful place, Gwenny?"

"It isn't a place I should have chosen myself," said Gwenny, "but, of course, I have not had a great deal of time to think about it. I have been too busy nursing you and keeping David

from praying himself into the next world! But I do think it is a place one might very soon have enough of. You want bracing air, dear—a mouthful of Cotswold breezes will do you all the good in the world. And, by the way, what a very disagreeable person your neighbor is. Is he always like that?"

"Disagreeable? M. de Vernay? Oh, you mustn't abuse him," said Frances, trying to speak lightly, though a faint flush came into her face. "He is only rather shy."

Lady Orme looked at Frances attentively.

"I have not had much opportunity of knowing him, I must confess," said Gwendolyn; "he has never once been to the house since the time when you were so very ill. You know you have been seriously ill, don't you, Frances? You gave us all a fright. He came then and stayed in the study all one night. In the morning I did go and talk to him a little, but I didn't find him very—very oncoming."

"Didn't you?" said Frances, with a wan smile.

She liked to think that he had come—that he had been there, waiting all through the night.

"He said he only waited to see if he could be of any use in going down to Azeba and fetching things. And, of course, he did drive down and bring M. le Curé back. You were anointed you know, Frances—we were not sure if you were quite conscious."

"I remember something about it," said Frances.

"Who is this M. de Vernay? Is he a kind of agent here?"

"Yes—he has been in charge of the property for the last five or six years," said Frances.

"I meet him every morning on the way to Mass," said David, looking up from his book, "and he always asks after you. And he said he hoped you would let him come and see you before you go."

Gwendolyn fussed over her sister-in-law like a hen with one chick. Aubrey's death had been horrible, and had been a great shock to them all, especially to Stephen, but she saw that it had been the means of solving many difficult problems. There had been about it, too, a touch of the heroic, which had gone far to redeem the character of the dead man. It was to Jean that they owed this knowledge, for he had caused the solitary survivor to be interviewed on the subject, and this man remembered perfectly the tall, fair Englishman who had snatched up a little child who was shrieking with terror, in an endeavor to soothe and console him during the last frightful scene before the ship sank. He had gone bravely to meet death, trying to comfort a little frightened child. Frances was glad to think it had happened thus; through all her grief, which had been deep and sincere and not untouched with remorse, she could picture his gallant bearing at the last; she could see in him again the lover of her girlhood, the husband to whom she had been so devotedly attached.

A few days before their departure she sent a message by David to Jean, asking him to come and see her that afternoon. She was lying out in the garden when he came, looking very white

and fragile in her black dress, her soft hair uncovered and her eyes sad and wistful and dark-ringed.

Jean bent down and kissed her hand. The change in her was very marked; he had not thought that he should find her so greatly altered.

"I hope you are better, madame," he said.

"Oh, I am quite well again, thank you," said Frances, "but my sister-in-law insists upon my remaining an invalid. We are starting to-morrow, did David tell you? And I have not lifted a finger to help them with the preparations."

"I hope you will get quite strong again in England," he said.

"You must write to me sometimes," said Frances, "and tell me about Oued Zerqa."

"I will write," he said tonelessly.

"I am thinking of letting David go to Stonyhurst," she said presently.

"You do not intend, then, to return to Oued Zerqa?" he said.

"I do not suppose I shall ever come back," she said; "we shall live at Cold Mead. From what Gwendolyn says, my brother-in-law is failing very much in health, and he is anxious we should go there."

"And I am afraid you have learned to hate Oued Zerqa," he said. "It has not been kind to you. And since your illness, perhaps, you will also think that it is not healthy—that it does not suit you."

"You are making a mistake," she said quickly; "I don't hate Oued Zerqa, M. de Vernay. It is

true that I have been very unhappy here, but it was not the fault of the place."

Presently he rose to go, making some excuse that he was afraid of tiring her. His deep and sad eyes rested upon her with a gaze so intent that she could scarcely meet it. There was, too, that look in them which she knew so well of combined darkness and radiance, as though their blackness was illuminated by an inner flame. His lips were set. She had known that it must come, this parting, she had made no effort to delay it; she had submitted to all the plans that Gwendolyn had made on her behalf, feeling that it must be better so—but now the actual moment had come she had the feeling that she had not sufficient strength to meet it. She only longed that he would go away, that he would leave her.

"Good-by," he said at last harshly. "And—*bon voyage!*"

"Good-by," said Frances.

And she watched him as he walked slowly across the terrace and disappeared down the little path that led into the road below.

CHAPTER XLIII

FRANCES had been at Cold Mead for nearly a year. During that time Stephen's death had occurred rather suddenly; he survived Aubrey only a few months. David had therefore inherited the title and estate, as well as a considerable sum of money. When he came of age he would find himself a rich man.

Frances had taken charge of Doris, who remained with her and David at Cold Mead. Lady Orme frequently came down to stay with them, and during the holidays Drayton Amory and his son Arthur were invariably added to the little party.

Jean de Vernay had written regularly to Frances during those months, long letters full of details relating to Oued Zerqa; to her they were full of interest. And in February, when the snow was lying thick on the Cotswold Hills, and a wild wind was sweeping across those barren heights, she had a letter from him telling her that he was in Paris, and with her permission would come to England to see her. She had written in reply, inviting him to come and stay at Cold Mead. She sent for David, who was enchanted at the prospect of seeing his friend. The boy had grown very much of late; he was now nearly fifteen and looked, perhaps, more.

Frances had sent the motor to Cirencester to meet Jean, who was to arrive that evening. She feared that it might be delayed, as the steep hills were deep in snow. It was nearly six o'clock before she heard the car coming up the drive toward the house. She was sitting in the library, and now she rose and moved to the window. Drawing aside the blind she saw Jean descend from the motor and enter the house. Every nerve was strained to hear the first sound of his step, of his voice. She thought of his words, spoken so many months ago, "If you should ever be free I would teach you to love me too." But she had had a long time in which to learn the lesson, and he had neither spoken nor written a single word of love to her since that evening at Oued Zerqa. He had been silent, but she had not misunderstood his silence. She had always known that he would come, and she had not found the time too long. She had had many things to think about, to occupy her; she had been happy and peaceful at Cold Mead. And she knew that Jean's silence had been his symbol of respect for the dead man, whose love had once been hers. A year had passed since the waves of the Mediterranean had closed over Aubrey's handsome, boyish face—and Jean was at the door.

A mist came before her eyes as he entered the room; she could hardly see him, so dim and blurred had his figure become. She wondered if he would find her changed. She wondered if he would still care. She went blindly toward

him, holding out her hand in greeting. The door had opened to admit him, and was now closed upon them both.

His dark, thin face was set; his eyes—his great, sad, weary eyes—sought hers; he held out both hands to her, and almost before she could realize it his arms were round her and his face was pressed close to hers.

"Frances . . . Frances . . . beloved . . . well-beloved . . ." he murmured in broken, detached syllables.

And Frances was looking up into his face, half laughing and half crying. His very touch had given her strength, had chased away at once all doubting and all fear.

"Oh, Jean—how late you are! I thought you were never coming! And are you very cold?"

"It is cold," he admitted, "and this snow has delayed everything." He turned her face gently with his hand, so that the light fell upon it. "You are more beautiful than all my dreams of you, Frances," he said. His eyes darkened as they rested upon hers. "Oh, my dear—I thought the time would never end. And now I have come to ask you to return to Oued Zerqa. Will you come with me, Frances? I have been waiting for you so long."

"Yes—I will come," she said softly.

"We must be married soon," he said.

"But I have things to arrange here."

"I thought, perhaps, that after Easter—in about six weeks," he said hesitatingly. "Don't say that is too soon, Frances."

"But there is David," she said.

"How is David?"

"He is well and happy; he has just come back from Stonyhurst on purpose to see you," said Frances; "I told you in my letters that this place belongs to him now. I think it is a good thing for him to realize his possessions before he finally decides to renounce them. It will make no difference to him, I know, but at least he will have learned their value. When he comes of age he can break the entail if he wishes, and renew it in favor of his next heirs, Drayton Amory and his son Arthur. David has quite made up his mind to be a Carthusian, Jean."

"And you," he said, looking down on her "you will not oppose it?"

She shook her head, and the tears came into her eyes. "He has such a strong vocation—I couldn't stand in his way," she answered.

For she could see now that the agonies her boy had undergone in the Caïd's palace remained only in his memory as a spiritual rather than a corporal adventure, and it was the spiritual aspect of them that was destined to shape and influence his life. It was for this he had endured and suffered, and had, by the grace of God, prevailed.

"But while he is still at school he must come out and spend his holidays with us," said Jean. "He won't mind your marrying again, Frances?"

"I think he will be very glad to hear I am going to marry you, Jean," she said quietly.

"You have never said anything about it to him?"

"How could I—when I have only just known it myself?"

She laughed—a little, happy laugh.

"But you knew how it was with me?" said Jean.

"That is a long time ago—and you might have changed!"

"Oh, Frances—are you quite sure you love me? Are you quite sure that you wish to come back?"

"I think—I am quite sure," she said gravely.

"Since when have you known this?" he asked her. "I was afraid I had offended you by speaking when I did. But I had been silent so long, and when you told me you were going away—I could not keep silence any longer."

She looked into his face. He must know the whole truth now—the worst as well as the best of her.

"Since when?" he repeated. He held her hands and drew her close to him; her face was hidden.

"Since the night when I came back from Hammam-Meskoutine and found that David had been taken away. I did not know it till then—I never dreamed of such a thing. I tried to put the thought away from me. I never knew that you cared, too, until so long afterward! I even fancied that you disliked my being at Oued Zerqa. And then the day you

spoke—and told me—I wanted to tell you too—— But I dared not.”

Jean bent his head and kissed her.

“Frances—beloved——” he whispered.

THE END

PRINTED BY BENZIGER BROTHERS, NEW YORK

BOOKS OF DOCTRINE, INSTRUCTION, DEVOTION, MEDITATION, BIOGRAPHY NOVELS, JUVENILES, ETC.

PUBLISHED BY
BENZIGER BROTHERS

CINCINNATI NEW YORK CHICAGO
443 MAIN ST. 36-38 BARCLAY ST. 205-207 W. WASHINGTON ST.

Books not marked *net* will be sent postpaid on receipt of the advertised price. Where books are marked *net* ten per cent. must be added for postage. Thus a book advertised at *net* \$1.00 will be sent postpaid on receipt of \$1.10.

1. INSTRUCTION, DOCTRINE, APOLOGETICS, CONTROVERSY, EDUCATIONAL

- AMERICAN PRIEST, THE. SCHMIDT. *net*, \$1.50.
ANECDOTES AND EXAM-
PLES ILLUSTRATING THE
CATHOLIC CATECHISM.
SPIRAGO. *net*, \$2.75.
ART OF PROFITING BY OUR
FAULTS. TISSOT. *net*, \$0.75.
CATECHIST AND THE CATE-
CHUMEN, THE. WEIGAND.
net, \$1.50.
CATECHISM EXPLAINED,
THE. SPIRAGO-CLARKE. *net*,
\$3.75.
CATECHISM OF THE VOWS
FOR THE USE OF RELIG-
IOUS. COTEL, S.J. *net*, \$0.50.
CATHOLIC AMERICAN, THE.
SCHMIDT. *net*, \$0.85.
CATHOLIC BELIEF. FAÀ DI
BRUNO. Paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*,
\$0.85.
CATHOLIC CEREMONIES AND
EXPLANATION OF THE
ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR.
DURAND. Paper, \$0.25; cloth,
net, \$0.85.
CATHOLIC CUSTOMS AND
SYMBOLS. HENRY, LITT. D.
net, \$1.90.
CATHOLIC'S READY ANSWER,
THE. HILL, S.J. *net*, \$2.00.
CATHOLIC TEACHER'S COM-
PANION, THE. KIRSCH, O.M.
Cap. Imitation leather. *net*,
\$2.75; real leather, \$3.75.
CATHOLIC TEACHING FOR
YOUNG AND OLD. WRAY.
Paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*, \$0.85.
CATHOLIC'S WORK IN THE
WORLD. HUSSEIN, S.J. *net*,
\$1.50.
CEREMONIAL FOR ALTAR
BOYS. BRITT, O.S.B. *net*,
\$0.60.
CHARACTERISTICS AND RE-
LIGION OF MODERN SO-
CIALISM. MING, S.J. 12mo.
net, \$2.50.
CHILD PREPARED FOR FIRST
COMMUNION. ZULUETA.
Paper, *\$0.08.
CHRISTIAN APOLOGETICS.
DEVIVIER-MRESSMER. *net*, \$3.50.
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION.
O'CONNELL. *net*, \$1.00.
CHRISTIAN MOTHER. CRA-
MER. *net*, \$0.85.
CHURCH AND THE PROB-
LEMS OF TODAY, THE.
SCHMIDT. *net*, \$0.85.
CORRECT THING FOR CATH-
OLICS. BUGG. *net*, \$1.25.
DIVINE GRACE. WIRTH, *net*,
\$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF CATHOLIC
MORALS. STAPLETON. *net*,
\$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE BAL-
TIMORE CATECHISM. KIN-
KEAD. *net*, \$1.25.
EXPLANATION OF THE APOS-
TLES' CREED. ROLFUS. *net*,
\$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE COM-
MANDMENTS. ROLFUS. *net*,
\$0.85.

EXPLANATION OF GOSPELS AND OF CATHOLIC WORSHIP. LAMBERT-BRENNAN. Paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*, \$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE MASS. COCHREM. *net*, \$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE HOLY SACRAMENTS. ROLFUS. *net*, \$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE PRAYERS AND CEREMONIES OF THE MASS. LANSLOTS, O.S.B. *net*, \$0.85.
EXPLANATION OF THE SALVE REGINA. ST. ALPHONSUS. *net*, \$1.25.
EXTREME UNCTION. Paper, \$0.12.
FOLLOWING OF CHRIST, THE. Plain edition. With reflections. \$0.34.
FOUNDATION OF TRUE MORALITY. SLATER, S.J. *net*, \$0.85.
FUNDAMENTALS OF THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. SCHLEUTER, S.J. *net*, \$0.75.
FUTURE LIFE, THE. SASIA, S.J. *net*, \$3.00.
GENERAL CONFESSION MADE EASY. KOMINGS, C.S.S.R. Cloth, \$*0.25.
GENTLEMAN, A. EGAN. *net*, \$0.85.
GIFT OF THE KING. By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
GLORIES AND TRIUMPHS OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. *net*, \$3.50.
GOFFINE'S DEVOUT INSTRUCTIONS ON THE EPISTLES AND GOSPELS FOR THE SUNDAYS AND HOLY-DAYS. *net*, \$1.75.
GREAT ENCYCLICAL LETTERS OF POPE LEO XIII. *net*, \$2.75.
GUIDE FOR SACRISTANS. *net*, \$1.50.
HANDBOOK OF THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION. WILMERS, S.J. *net*, \$2.50.
HEAVEN OPEN TO SOULS. SEMPLE, S.J. *net*, \$2.75.
HINTS TO PREACHERS. HENRY LITT, D. *net*, \$1.90.
HOME WORLD, THE. DOYLE, S.J. Paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*, \$1.25.
HOW TO COMFORT THE SICK. KERRA, C.S.S.R. *net*, \$0.85.
HOW TO MAKE THE MISSION. By a Dominican Father. Paper, \$*0.12.
INSTRUCTIONS ON THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD AND THE SACRAMENTS OF THE CHURCH. ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI. *net*, \$0.85.
INTRODUCTION TO A DEVOUT LIFE. ST. FRANCIS DE SALES. *net*, \$1.00.
LADY, A. BUGG. *net*, \$1.25.
LAWS OF THE KING. By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
LESSONS OF THE SAVIOUR. By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
LETTERS ON MARRIAGE. SPALDING, S.J. *net*, \$1.25.
LITTLE ALTAR BOY'S MANUAL. \$0.50.
MANUAL OF SELF-KNOWLEDGE AND CHRISTIAN PERFECTION. A. HENRY, C.S.S.R. *net*, \$0.75.
MANUAL OF THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY. GEIERMANN, C.S.S.R. Paper, \$*0.45; cloth, *net*, \$0.90.
MASS-SERVER'S CARD. Per doz., *net*, \$0.50.
MORALITY OF MODERN SOCIALISM. MING, S.J. *net*, \$2.50.
NARROW WAY, THE. GEIERMANN, C.S.S.R. *net*, \$0.90.
OUR FIRST COMMUNION. REV. WILLIAM R. KELLY. Retail, \$0.25; to schools, \$0.21.
OUR NUNS. LORD, S.J. Regular Edition, \$1.75; De Luxe Edition, *net*, \$3.00.
OUT TO WIN. Straight Talks to Boys on the Way to Manhood. CONROY, S.J. *net*, \$1.50.
PRINCIPAL CATHOLIC PRACTICES. SCHMIDT. *net*, \$1.50.
QUEEN'S FESTIVALS, THE. By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
REASONABLENESS OF CATHOLIC CEREMONIES AND PRACTICES. BURKE. *net*, \$0.75.
RELIGIOUS STATE, THE. ST. ALPHONSUS. *net*, \$0.75.
SACRAMENTALS OF THE HOLY CATHOLIC CHURCH. LAMBING. Paper, \$*25; cloth, *net*, \$0.85.
SHORT CONFERENCES ON THE SACRED HEART. BRINKMEYER. *net*, \$0.85.

- SHORT COURSE IN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE.** Paper, *\$0.12.
- SHORT STORIES ON CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.** *net*, \$0.85.
- SIMPLE COURSE OF RELIGION.** WEIGAND. *net* price to schools per 100, \$4.00.
- SOCIALISM: ITS THEORETICAL BASIS AND PRACTICAL APPLICATION.** CATHERINE-GETTELMAN. *net*, \$2.75.
- SOCIAL ORGANIZATION IN PARISHES.** GARESCHE, S.J. *net*, \$2.75.
- SODALITY CONFERENCES.** GARESCHE, S.J. *net*, \$2.75. First Series.
- SODALITY CONFERENCES.** GARESCHE, S.J. *net*, \$2.75. Second Series.
- SPIRITISM FACTS AND FRAUDS.** BLACKMORE, S.J. *net*, \$2.90.
- SPIRITUAL PEPPER AND SALT.** STANG. Paper, *\$0.45; cloth, *net*, \$0.90.
- STORIES OF THE MIRACLES OF OUR LORD.** By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
- STORY OF THE FRIENDS OF JESUS.** By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
- SUNDAY-SCHOOL DIRECTOR'S GUIDE.** SLOAN. *net*, \$1.50.
- SUNDAY-SCHOOL TEACHER'S GUIDE.** SLOAN. *net*, \$0.85.
- TALKS TO BOYS.** CONROY, S.J. Paper, \$0.25.
- TALKS TO NURSES.** SPADING, S.J. *net*, \$1.50.
- TALKS TO PARENTS.** CONROY, S.J. *net*, \$1.50.
- TALKS WITH THE LITTLE ONES ABOUT THE APOSTLES' CREED.** By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
- TALKS WITH OUR DAUGHTERS.** SISTER M. ELEANORE, Ph.D. Cloth, *net*, \$1.25, oose leather, *net*, \$2.00.
- TALKS WITH TEACHERS.** SISTER M. PAULA. *net*, \$1.50.
- TRUE POLITENESS.** DEMORE. *net*, \$0.85.
- VOCATIONS EXPLAINED.** Cui flush, *\$0.12.
- WAY OF INTERIOR PEACE.** LEHEN, S.J. *net*, \$2.25.
- WHAT THE CHURCH TEACHES DRURY.** Paper, *\$0.45; cloth, *net*, \$0.90.
- WONDERFUL SACRAMENTS.** THE DOYLE, S.J. *net*, paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*, \$1.25.
- WONDER DAYS.** THE TAGGART. *postpaid*, \$0.35.
- WONDER GIFTS.** THE TAGGART. *postpaid*, \$0.35.
- WONDER STORY.** THE TAGGART. *postpaid*, \$0.35.

II DEVOTION, MEDITATION, SPIRITUAL READING, PRAYER-BOOKS

- ABANDONMENT:** or Absolute Surrender of Self to Divine Providence. CAUSSADE, S.J. *net*, \$0.75.
- ADORATION OF THE BLESSED SACRAMENT.** TESNIERE. *net*, \$0.85.
- BLESSED SACRAMENT BOOK.** Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Im. leather. \$2.25.
- BREAD OF LIFE.** THE WILLIAM. *net*, \$1.35.
- CATHOLIC GIRL'S GUIDE.** THE. Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Seal grain cloth, stiff covers, red edges, \$1.35. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$1.50; gold edges, \$2.00. Real leather, limp, gold edges, \$2.25.
- COMMUNION DEVOTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS SISTERS**
- OF NOTRE DAME.** Imitation leather, *net*, \$2.75; leather, \$3.75.
- DEVOTIONS AND PRAYERS BY ST. ALPHONSUS.** WARD. *net*, \$1.50.
- DEVOTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE SICK ROOM.** KREBS. *net*, \$0.85.
- EARLY FRIENDS OF CHRIST.** THE. CONROY, S.J. *net*, \$1.75.
- EPITOME OF THE PRIESTLY LIFE.** AN. ARVISENET-O'SULLIVAN. *net*, \$2.50.
- EUCHARISTIC SOUL ELEVATIONS.** STADELMAN, C.S.Sp. *net*, \$0.60.
- EVER TIMELY THOUGHTS.** GARESCHE, S.J. *net*, 0.90.
- FAIREST FLOWER OF PARADISE.** LEFICIER, O.S.M. *net*, \$1.50.

FIRST SPIRITUAL AID TO THE SICK. McGRATH. *net*, \$0.60.
FOR FREQUENT COMMUNICANTS. ROCHE, S.J. Paper, *\$0.12.
GLORIES OF THE SACRED HEART. HAUSHERR, S.J. *net*, \$1.75.
GO TO JOSEPH. LEPICIER, O.S.M. *net*, \$1.50.
GREETINGS TO THE CHRIST-CHILD. Poems. *net*, \$0.60.
HELP FOR THE POOR SOULS. ACKERMANN, \$0.45.
HELPS TO A SPIRITUAL LIFE. SCHNEIDER. *net*, \$0.45.
HER LITTLE WAY. CLARKE. *net*, \$1.00.
HIDDEN TREASURE, THE. ST. LEONARD. *net*, \$0.75.
HOLY HOUR, THE. KEILEY. 16mo, *\$0.12.
HOLY HOUR OF ADORATION. STANG. *net*, \$0.90.
HOLY SOULS BOOK. Reflections on Purgatory. A Complete Prayer-Book. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Imitation leather, round corners, red edges, \$1.75; gold edges, \$2.25; real leather, gold edges, \$3.00.
HOLY VIATICUM OF LIFE AS OF DEATH. DEVER. *net*, \$1.25.
IMITATION OF THE SACRED HEART. ARNOUDT. *net*, \$1.75.
IN HEAVEN WE KNOW OUR OWN. BLOT, S.J. *net*, \$0.75.
JESUS CHRIST, THE KING OF OUR HEARTS. LEPICIER, O.S.M. *net*, \$1.50.
KEEP THE GATE. WILLIAMS, S.J. *net*, \$1.50.
LIFE'S LESSONS. GARBOCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
LITTLE COMMUNICANTS' PRAYER-BOOK. SLOAN. \$0.25.
LITTLE MANUAL OF ST. ANTHONY. LASANCE. *net*, \$0.35.
LITTLE MANUAL OF ST. JOSEPH. LINGS. *net*, \$0.25.
LITTLE MANUAL OF ST. RITA. McGRATH. \$0.90.
LITTLE MASS BOOK, THE. LYNCH. Paper, *\$0.08.
LITTLE OFFICE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY. In Lat.-Eng. *net*, \$1.50; in Latin only, *net*, \$1.25.
LITTLE OFFICE OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION. Paper, *\$0.08.
MANNA OF THE SOUL. Vest-pocket Edition. A little Book of Prayer for Men and Women. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Oblong, 32mo. \$0.85.
MANNA OF THE SOUL. A Book of Prayer for Men and Women. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Extra Large Type Edition, 544 pages, 16mo. \$1.75.
MANNA OF THE SOUL. Prayer-Book by Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Thin Edition. Im. leather. \$1.25.
MANNA OF THE SOUL. Prayer-Book by Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Thin Edition with Epistles and Gospels. \$1.50.
MANUAL OF THE HOLY EUCHARIST. LASANCE. Imitation leather, limp, red edges. *net*, \$1.75.
MARY, HELP OF CHRISTIANS. HAMMER, O.F.M. *net*, \$3.50.
MASS DEVOTIONS AND READINGS ON THE MASS. LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges. *net*, \$1.75.
MEANS OF GRACE. BRENNAN. *net*, \$5.00.
MEDITATIONS FOR ALL THE DAYS OF THE YEAR. HAMON, S.S. 5 vols. *net*, \$8.75.
MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY IN THE MONTH. NEPVEU, S.J. *net*, \$0.85.
MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR. BAXTER, S.J. *net*, \$2.00.
MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY IN THE YEAR ON THE LIFE OF OUR LORD. VERCRUYSSER, S.J. 2 vols. *net*, \$4.50.
MEDITATIONS FOR THE USE OF THE SECULAR CLERGY. CHAIGNON, S.J. 2 vols. *net*, \$7.00.
MEDITATIONS ON THE SEVEN WORDS OF OUR LORD ON THE CROSS. PERRAUD. *net*, \$1.00.
MEDITATIONS ON THE LIFE, THE TEACHING AND THE PASSION OF JESUS CHRIST. ILC-CLARKE. 2 vols. *net*, \$5.00.

- MEDITATIONS ON THE MYSTERIES OF OUR HOLY FAITH.** BARRAUD, S.J. 2 vols. *net*, \$4.50.
- MEDITATIONS ON THE SUFFERINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.** PERINALDO. *net*, \$0.85.
- MISSION BOOK FOR THE MARRIED.** GIRARDEY, C.S.S.R. \$0.90.
- MISSION REMEMBRANCE OF THE REDEMPITORIST FATHERS.** GEIERMANN, C.S.S.R. \$0.90.
- MOMENTS BEFORE THE TABERNACLE.** RUSSELL, S.J. *net*, \$0.60.
- MORE SHORT SPIRITUAL READINGS FOR MARY'S CHILDREN.** CECILIA. *net*, \$0.85.
- MOST BELOVED WOMAN, THE.** GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
- MY GOD AND MY ALL.** A Prayer-Book for Children. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Black or white, cloth, square corners, white edges, retail, \$0.35. Imit. leather, black or white, seal grain, gold edges, retail, \$0.70. Persian Morocco, gold side and edges, retail, \$1.25. Same, white leather, retail, \$1.50. Celluloid, retail, \$1.00; with Indulgence Cross, retail, \$1.35.
- MY PRAYER-BOOK.** Happiness in Goodness. Reflections, Counsels, Prayers, and Devotions. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. 16mo. Seal grain cloth, stiff covers, \$1.35. Imitation leather, limp, round corners, red edges, \$1.50; gold edges, \$2.00. Real Leather, gold edges, \$2.25.
- MY PRAYER-BOOK.** Extra Large Type Edition. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Seal grain cloth, stiff covers, square corners, red edges, \$1.75. Imitation leather, round corners, red edges, \$2.00. Imitation leather, round corners, gold edges, \$2.75. American seal, limp, gold side, gold edges, \$8.25.
- NEW MISSAL FOR EVERY DAY, THE.** Complete Missal in English for Every Day in the Year. New 1924 Edition. With Introduction Notes, and a Book of Prayer. By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Oblong, 32mo. Imitation leather. \$2.25.
- NEW MISSAL FOR EVERY DAY.** (Student's Edition.) By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Retail, \$1.75.
- NEW MANUAL OF ST. ANTHONY.** *net*, \$0.90.
- NEW TESTAMENT.** 12mo edition. Large type. Cloth, *net*, \$1.75; 32mo edition. Flexible, *net*, \$0.45; cloth, *net*, \$0.80; Amer. seal, *net*, \$1.35.
- NEW TESTAMENT AND PRAYER-BOOK COMBINED.** *net*, \$0.85.
- NOVENA IN HONOR OF BLESSED THERESE OF THE CHILD JESUS.** COLEMAN, *net*, \$0.15.
- OFFICE OF HOLY WEEK, COMPLETE.** Latin and English. Cut flush, *net*, \$0.40; silk cloth, *net*, \$0.60; Am. seal, red edges, *net*, \$1.25.
- OUR FAVORITE DEVOTIONS.** LINGS. *net*, \$1.00.
- OUR FAVORITE NOVENAS.** LINGS. *net*, \$1.00.
- OUR LADY BOOK.** By Rev. F. X. LASANCE. Imitation leather, limp, round corners, red edges, \$1.85. Morocco Grain, Imitation Leather, gold edges, \$2.50. American Seal, limp, gold side, gold edges, \$3.00. Rutland, limp, red under gold edges, \$3.75. Turkey Morocco, limp, gold roll, red under gold edges, \$4.75.
- OUTLINE MEDITATIONS.** CECILIA. *net*, \$1.75.
- PATHS OF GOODNESS, THE.** GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
- POCKET PRAYER-BOOK.** Cloth. *net*, 0.45.
- POLICEMEN'S AND FIREMEN'S COMPANION.** McGRATH. \$0.35.
- PRAYER-BOOK FOR RELIGIOUS.** LASANCE. 16mo. Imitation leather, limp, red edges, *net*, \$2.50.
- PRAYERS FOR OUR DEAD.** McGRATH. Cloth, \$0.35; imitation leather, \$0.75.
- PRISONER OF LOVE.** Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$2.00.
- PRIVATE RETREAT FOR RELIGIOUS.** GEIERMANN, C.S.S.R. *net*, \$2.50.

REFLECTIONS FOR RELIGIOUS. LASANCE. *net*, \$2.50.
REJOICE IN THE LORD. Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. *net*, \$1.75.
ROSEWREATH FOR THE CROWNING. A. REV. JOHN P. CLARKE. *net*, \$1.00.
ROSARY, THE CROWN OF MARY. Dominican Father. 16mo, paper, *\$0.12.
RULES OF LIFE FOR THE PASTOR OF SOULS. SLATER-RAUCH. *net*, \$1.50.
SACRED HEART BOOK. Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$1.75.
SACRED HEART STUDIED IN THE SACRED SCRIPTURES. SAINTRAIN. *net*, \$0.85.
SACRIFICE OF THE MASS WORTHILY CELEBRATED. CHAIGNON, S.J. *net*, \$2.75.
SECRET OF SANCTITY. CRASSET, S.J. *net*, \$0.85.
SERAPHIC GUIDE, THE. \$1.00.
SHORT MEDITATIONS FOR EVERY DAY. LASAUSSE. *net*, \$0.85.
SHORT VISITS TO THE BLESSED SACRAMENT. LASANCE. *net*, \$0.35.
SODALIST'S VADE MECUM. *net*, \$0.90.
SOLDIERS' AND SAILORS' COMPANION. McGRATH. Vest-pocket shape, silk cloth or khaki. \$0.35.
SOUVENIR OF THE NOVITIATE. TAYLOR. *net*, \$0.85.
SPIRIT OF SACRIFICE, THE, AND THE LIFE OF SACRIFICE IN THE RELIGIOUS STATE. GIRAUD. *net*, \$3.00.
SPIRITUAL CONSIDERATIONS. BUCKLER, O.P. *net*, \$0.85.
SUNDAY MISSAL, THE. LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$1.90.
THINGS IMMORTAL, THE. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
THOUGHTS ON THE RELIGIOUS LIFE. LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, *net*, \$2.50.
THY KINGDOM COME. MOPFATT, S.J. *net*, \$0.30.
TRUE SPOUSE OF CHRIST. LIGUORI. *net*, \$1.75.
VALUES EVERLASTING, THE. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
VENERATION OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN. ROHNER-BRENNAN. *net*, \$0.85.
VIGIL HOUR, THE. RYAN, S.J. Paper, *\$0.12.
VISITS TO JESUS IN THE TABERNACLE. LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$2.00.
VISITS TO THE MOST HOLY SACRAMENT. LIGUORI. *net*, \$0.90.
WAY OF THE CROSS. Paper, *\$0.08.
WAY OF THE CROSS. Illustrated. Method of ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI. *\$0.15.
WAY OF THE CROSS, THE. Very large-type edition. Method of ST. ALPHONSUS LIGUORI. *\$0.20.
WAY OF THE CROSS. Eucharistic method. *\$0.15.
WAY OF THE CROSS. By a Jesuit Father. *\$0.25.
WAY OF THE CROSS. Method of ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI. *\$0.15.
WITH GOD. Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$2.00.
YEARNING FOR GOD. WILLIAMS, S.J. *net*, \$1.50.
YOUNG MAN'S GUIDE, THE. Prayer-Book by FATHER LASANCE. Seal grain cloth, stiff covers, red edges, \$1.35. Im. leather, limp, red edges, \$1.50; gold edges, \$2.00.
YOUR INTERESTS ETERNAL. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
YOUR NEIGHBOR AND YOU. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
YOUR OWN HEART. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.
YOUR SOUL'S SALVATION. GARESCHÉ, S.J. *net*, \$0.90.

III. THEOLOGY, LITURGY, HOLY SCRIPTURE, PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE, CANON LAW

ALTAR PRAYERS. Edition A: English and Latin, *net*, \$1.75. Edition B: German-English-Latin, *net*, \$2.00.
ANNOUNCEMENT BOOK. 12mo *net*, \$2.50.
BAPTISMAL RITUAL. 12mo *net*, \$1.50.

- BENEDICENDA. SCHULZE.** *net*, \$2.75.
- BURIAL RITUAL.** Cloth, *net*, \$2.50; sheepskin, *net*, \$3.75.
- CASES OF CONSCIENCE.** SLATER, S.J. 2 vols. *net*, \$6.00.
- CHRIST'S TEACHING CONCERNING DIVORCE.** GIGOT. *net*, \$2.75.
- CLERGYMAN'S HANDBOOK OF LAW.** SCANLON. *net*, \$2.25.
- COMBINATION RECORD FOR SMALL PARISHES.** *net*, \$8.00.
- COMMENTARY ON THE PSALMS.** BERRY. *net*, \$3.50.
- COMPENDIUM SACRÆ LITURGICÆ.** WAPPELHORST, O.F.M. *net*, \$3.00.
- GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.** GIGOT. *net*, \$4.00.
- GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.** Abridged edition. GIGOT. *net*, \$2.75.
- HOLY BIBLE, THE.** Large type, handy size. Cloth, \$2.50.
- HYMNS OF THE BREVIARY AND MISSAL, THE.** BRITT, O.S.B. *net*, \$3.00.
- JESUS LIVING IN THE PRIEST.** MILLET, S.J.-BYRNE. *net*, \$3.25.
- LIBER STATUS ANIMARUM,** or Parish Census Book. Large edition, size, 14x10 inches. 100 Families. 200 pp., half leather, *net*, \$7.00; 200 Families. 400 pp. half leather, *net*, \$8.00; Pocket Edition. *net*, \$0.50.
- MANUAL OF HOMILETICS AND CATECHETICS.** SCHUECH-LUEBERMANN. *net*, \$2.25.
- MARRIAGE LEGISLATION IN THE NEW CODE.** AYRINHAC, S.S. *net*, \$2.50.
- MARRIAGE RITUAL.** Cloth, gilt edges, *net*, \$2.50; sheepskin, gilt edges, *net*, \$3.75.
- MESSAGE OF MOSES AND MODERN HIGHER CRITICISM.** GIGOT. Paper. *net*, \$0.15.
- MISSALE ROMANUM.** Benziger Brothers' Authorized Vatican Edition. Black or Red Amer. morocco, gold edges, *net*, \$15.00; Red Amer. morocco, gold stamping and edges, *net*, \$17.50. Red finest quality morocco, red under gold edges, *net*, \$22.00.
- MORAL PRINCIPLES AND MEDICAL PRACTICE.** COPPENS, S.J.-SPALDING, S.J. *net*, \$2.50.
- OUTLINES OF JEWISH HISTORY.** GIGOT, D.D. *net*, \$2.75.
- OUTLINES OF NEW TESTAMENT HISTORY.** GIGOT. *net*, \$2.75.
- PASTORAL THEOLOGY.** STANG. *net*, \$2.25.
- PENAL LEGISLATION IN THE NEW CODE OF CANON LAW.** AYRINHAC, S.S. *net*, \$3.00.
- PEW COLLECTION AND RECEIPT BOOK.** Indexed. 11x8 inches. *net*, \$3.00.
- PREPARATION FOR MARRIAGE.** MCHUGH, O.P. *net*, \$0.60.
- PRAXIS SYNODALIS.** Manuale Synodi Diocesanae ac Provincialis Celebranda. *net*, \$1.00.
- RECORD OF BAPTISMS.** 200 pages, 700 entries, *net*, \$7.00. 400 pages, 1400 entries, *net*, \$9.00. 600 pages, 2100 entries. *net*, \$12.00.
- RECORD OF CONFIRMATIONS.** *net*, \$6.00.
- RECORD OF FIRST COMMUNIONS.** *net*, \$6.00.
- RECORD OF INTERMENTS.** *net*, \$6.00.
- RECORD OF MARRIAGES.** Size 14x10 inches. 200 pages, 700 entries, *net*, \$7.00. 400 pages, 1400 entries, *net*, \$9.00. 600 pages, 2100 entries, *net*, \$12.00.
- RITUALE COMPENDIOSUM.** Cloth, *net*, \$1.25; seal, *net*, \$2.00.
- SANCTUARY BOYS' ILLUSTRATED MANUAL.** MCCALLEN, S.S. *net*, \$1.00.
- SHORT HISTORY OF MORAL THEOLOGY.** SLATER, S.J. *net*, \$0.75.
- SPECIAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.** GIGOT. Part I. *net*, \$2.75. Part II, *net*, \$3.25.
- TEXTUAL CONCORDANCE OF THE HOLY SCRIPTURES.** WILLIAMS. *net*, \$5.75.
- WHAT CATHOLICS HAVE DONE FOR SCIENCE.** BERNAN. *net*, \$0.85.

IV. SERMONS

- CHRISTIAN MYSTERIES.** BONOMELLI, D.D. BYRNE, 4 vols., *net*, \$9.00.
- EIGHT-MINUTE SERMONS.** DEMOUY, 2 vols., *net*, \$4.00.
- FUNERAL SERMONS.** WIRTH, O.S.B. *net*, \$3.00.
- HOMILIES ON THE COMMON OF SAINTS.** BONOMELLI-BYRNE, 2 vols., *net*, \$4.50.
- HOMILIES ON THE EPISTLES AND GOSPELS.** BONOMELLI-BYRNE, 4 vols., *net*, \$9.00.
- POPULAR SERMONS ON THE CATECHISM.** BAMBERG-THURSTON, S.J. 3 vols., *net*, \$8.50.
- SERMONS.** CANON SHEEHAN. *net*, \$3.00.
- SERMONS FOR CHILDREN'S MASSES.** FRASSINETTI-LINGS. *net*, \$2.50.
- SERMONS FOR THE SUNDAYS AND CHIEF FESTIVALS OF THE ECCLESIASTICAL YEAR.** POTTGEISSER, S.J. 2 vols., *net*, \$5.00.
- THREE-MINUTE HOMILIES.** McDONOUGH. *net*, \$2.00.
- SERMONS.** WHELAN, O.S.A. *net*, \$2.00.
- SERMONS ON THE MASS, THE SACRAMENTS AND THE SACRAMENTALS.** FLYNN. *net*, \$2.75.
- SODALITY CONFERENCES.** GARESCHE, S.J. *net*, \$2.75.

V. HISTORY, BIOGRAPHY, HAGIOLOGY, TRAVEL

- AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA.** O'CONNOR, S.J. *net*, \$1.75.
- CHILD'S LIFE OF ST. JOAN OF ARC.** MANNIX. *net*, \$1.50.
- GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE CATHOLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES.** BURNS, C.S.C. *net*, \$2.50.
- HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.** BRUECK, 2 vols., *net*, \$5.50.
- HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.** BUSINGER-BRENNAN. *net*, \$3.50.
- HISTORY OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH.** BUSINGER-BRENNAN. *net*, \$10.75.
- HISTORY OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION.** COBBETT-GASQUET. *net*, \$0.85.
- HISTORY OF THE MASS.** O'BRIEN. *net*, \$2.00.
- HOLINESS OF THE CHURCH IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.** KEMPF, S.J. *net*, \$2.75.
- ILLUSTRATED LIVES OF PATRON SAINTS FOR BOYS.** MANNIX. *net*, \$1.00.
- ILLUSTRATED LIVES OF PATRON SAINTS FOR GIRLS.** MANNIX. *net*, \$1.00.
- LIFE OF ST. MARGARET MARY ALACOQUE.** Illustrated. BOUGAUD. *net*, \$2.75.
- LIFE OF CHRIST.** BUSINGER-BRENNAN. Illustrated. Half morocco, gilt edges, *net*, \$15.00.
- LIFE OF CHRIST.** Illustrated. BUSINGER-MULLETT. *net*, \$3.50.
- LIFE OF CHRIST.** COCHEM. *net*, \$0.85.
- LIFE OF ST. IGNATIUS LOYOLA.** GENELLI, S.J. *net*, \$0.85.
- LIFE OF MADEMOISELLE LE GRAS.** *net*, \$0.85.
- LIFE OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN.** ROHNER. *net*, \$0.85.
- LITTLE LIVES OF THE SAINTS FOR CHILDREN.** BERTHOLD. *net*, \$0.75.
- LITTLE PICTORIAL LIVES OF THE SAINTS.** With 400 illustrations. *net*, \$2.00.
- LIVES OF THE SAINTS.** BUTLER. Paper, \$0.25; cloth, *net*, \$0.85.
- LOURDES.** CLARKE, S.J. *net*, \$0.85.
- MARY THE QUEEN.** By a Religious. *net*, \$0.60.
- MIDDLE AGES, THE.** SHAHAN. *net*, \$3.00.
- MILL TOWN PASTOR, A.** CONROY, S.J. *net*, \$1.75.
- NAMES THAT LIVE IN CATHOLIC HEARTS.** SADLIER. *net*, \$0.85.
- OUR NUNS.** LORD, S.J. Regular Edition, \$1.75; DeLuxe Edition, *net*, \$3.00.
- OUR OWN ST. RITA.** CORCORAN, O.S.A. *net*, \$1.50.
- PASSIONISTS, THE.** WARD, C.P. *net*, \$4.00.
- PATRON SAINTS FOR CATHOLIC YOUTH.** By M. E. MAN-



UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS-URBANA



3 0112 041678894

